

When Ice Meets Fire, When the Ground Meets the Sky

by Peppered Potato

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Summary: Jack Frost is a lonely spirit trying to find his purpose in the world. Hiccup is one of the few remaining children in his village as dragons have begun to take them for no apparent reason. Little do these two know that their lives are about to change because of Pitch Black and his newfound alliance with the world's deadliest dragon: the Green Death. More thorough summary inside.

1. Shooting Down Fleeting Shadows

_Hello everyone, and welcome to this RotG/HTTYD crossover! Before I get into the story, I want to make a big thank you shout out to __**TsukinArchangel **__for helping me come up with this brilliant idea. His thoughts were the base, but I tweaked them up to fit what I wanted. (Sorry dude, but Jamie may not make it in this thing â€" forgive me!)

>Please note the first few chapters may somewhat resemble the respective movies (what with introducing characters and the likes) though there will be some differences due to the plot and setting. And it will take some time before the two parts of the stories will become one.

_**Summary: **__AU â€" takes place in a fictional world with magic and flying ships and stuff. Jack Frost is a lonely winter immortal trying to find his purpose in the world. Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III is one of the few remaining children in his village as dragons have begun to steal the youngsters. Little do these two know that their lives are about to change because of one notorious villain, Pitch Black, and his newfound alliance with the world's deadliest dragon: the Green Death. Soon the Guardians' paths will cross with those of the Vikings, and it's up to one frost spirit and one dragon rider to form a friendship in order to bring peace to all children in the world. Rated T for actions scenes and mild language._

_And, as always, __**I do not own **__**Rise of the Guardians**__** or **__**How to Train Your Dragon**__. I simply borrow the characters

for writing and fun things like that._

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><p>1 " Shooting Down Fleeting Shadows

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><p>Part 1 " The Guardians

North Pole: Santoff Claussen

North was, as always, working in his workshop. His real name was Nikolai, of Russki descent, but the yetis he worked with gave him this nickname, he being the only human to live so far north. He found the name suited him, the northern areas of the world being like him: cold and tough and distant, but with enough wonder and magic, especially for the people of the south who'd never seen snow in their lives.

The man was a jolly fellow with a long white beard and respectably wide girth. His tattoos were the same as always on his muscular arms " NAUGHTY on one arm, NICE on the other. He was very skilled in sword fighting, but his primary job was the invention of toys. His workshop was where the magic happened. Each blueprint for each toy was created in that room. North claimed the view from the windows was what he found his inspiration from, the blue skies and snowy mountains. His current project was a model train, and it was going beautifully.

It was then, while in his own little workshop, that the sounds of panic came. At first it was just the annoying jingle of the elves' hats, which the man ignored. The elves were silly little nuisances at best. But then North heard a yeti cry out, then another, and frowned; almost nothing scared a yeti. Nothing except "could it be?

He immediately stopped what he was doing and rushed out of the cluttered room.

All the foot-tall beings were gathering in a cluster near the center of the central hall where the globe was located. Several yetis had stopped what they were doing to watch. Many of them appeared panicked, looking to North for advice. The older man walked over to the globe. All the lights on it " the children " were flickering. Something was disturbing the peace; he could feel it in his belly.

As North was making his way closer to observe this troubling scene a yeti hollered and pointed to a shadowy corner. The man stared at the spot. The shadows there seemed to be moving on their own accord, stretching and shrinking.

North realized that he had left his weapons, the twin swords, in his workshop. Though this was normal, as he had no need to be armed when he worked, something in his gut told him to retrieve them. He quickly turned around; they lay gleaming on his workbench as always. North picked them up and gave them an experimental swing before leaving the office. Fighting instincts kicking in, he ducked and ran from pillar to pillar, as deftly as any assassin. At the very last pillar closest to the globe, he crouched and waited.

At first nothing happened. Then, as if from a nightmare, all the shadows in the room moved in unison. They coagulated in the center of the room and formed the shape that resembled a man. His skin was grey, hair black as ebony, long robes flowing behind him like a trail of night. This figure's presence itself was causing the small group of yetis gathered around the globe to shuffle away with fear.

As if sensing their unease, the man made of shadows began to glide closer to them, a smile of sharp white teeth visible between his thin lips. He towered over them, the way a parent did a child, but without any love in his glowing yellow eyes.

North took a step forward from behind the pillar so he was in plain sight. The tall man turned and smiled at the other.

"We meet again, North," he said in a voice cold as ice before vanishing.

North stood in the middle of the room, dumbfounded, as the shadows returned to their normal positions. This was bad. This was very bad. He had to notify the others quickly.

After barking an order at the confused elves to continue their work, he reached into the pocket of his work clothes and pulled out a snow globe. This wasn't any ordinary snow globe, though. Concentrating, North threw it straight into the air. It seemed to sail up on its own accord through the glass ceiling before bursting into a million particles of light. The sky sent the artificial auroras in four different directions.

North relaxed slightly. He knew that Manny and the other Guardians would see this and report straight to the palace. He retrieved his snow globe (which had floated down safely to his feet) and whispered to it, "Central, the Emperor's Palace."

The image of his destination swirled in the glassy ball. North tossed it gently against the wall, the portal opened, and he slipped through without a backwards glance. The yetis would take care of the shipbuilding business. Right now, the northern man had more important things to worry about.

Central: the Emperor's Palace

The four Guardians gathered at the foot of the stairs in the throne room. It was large, more like a hall than a room, with bamboo mats for flooring and walls made of delicate rice paper and dark wood. There was a dim glow to the place like the white of moonlight.

North had been the first to arrive, but was soon followed by a hole opening up in the ground. E. Aster Bunnymund, one of the last living Pookas from the south-eastern island of Auslandia, hopped out irritably. He was 6'1" of lean, mean, fighting (and egg-loving) machine. Bunnymund chose to show his human appearance today (as Pookas were known to have both an animal and human form). He wore his grey-blond hair in a long ponytail down his back. The tribal tattoos were still visible on his coppery skin, which he wore with pride. His usual artillery of boomerangs was strapped to his back, exploding eggs in a pouch on his hip. He greeted North with his thick Auslandian accent, green eyes asking the question that North didn't

want to answer.

_Later, _he mouthed. Bunny shrugged and left it at that.

The next was Toothiana, Tooth for short. She was a fey and a rarity of her kind, being one of the few to grow to the size of an actual human. She also took more characteristics of a human than her original half-hummingbird form, with blond hair chopped into a spiky pixy cut and enough feathers shed for her to require clothes â€" a light gossamer robe that floated around her form in a swirling array of purples and greens much like her former coloration. Her ethereal wings fluttered a mile a minute behind her, keeping her feet from touching the ground. As always, a small gaggle of fairies (whom she referred to as her 'ladies') followed close behind her. Each was still small enough to fit in the palm of one's hand and kept most of their hummingbird form.

Last to show up was the Sandman. He flew through the open door in a small ship resembling a canoe made from sand. It vanished as he floated over to where the others were. He was a small man, made completely of glowing golden sand. Everything, from his robe to his hair and eyes, was pure, silent gold. Probably one of the busiest of the Guardians, he was as quiet as always. Then again, the Sandman never talked. Never spoke a word in his life. But he made up for it by creating images made of sand over his head.

As they all gathered, the Man in the Moon spoke.

"As you are aware, North has called you all here. This was due to a most troubling sight which he has already informed me of."

Everyone turned to look at the bamboo screen above them. As was customary, no one knew what MiM looked like. He would be shrouded from view at night by the moon, where his powers came from, but during the day he would always sit behind a screen. Still, his very voice held a powerful presence, and none of the Guardians dared to defy him. After all, their purpose was to serve him.

"What was it?" Tooth asked, looking directly at North with quizzical violet eyes. "What did you see?"

The older man hesitated. This wasn't news he wanted to bring, but it had to be done. "Pitch Black is back."

The reactions were instantaneous. Sandy's eyes widened with shock. Tooth gasped, and her little fairies all gathered closer to her, clutching her dress to hide behind and all quivering in fear. Even Bunnymund paled a bit before an angry fire returned to his eyes and cheeks.

"What the bloody hell d'ya mean he's back?!"

"The lights on the globe began to blink. I knew children were threatened. Then I saw Pitch. He came out of shadows. They formed his shape and then he vanished."

"Wait just a tick. So you're saying that you didn't really see Pitch, just his outline."

"Well, yes!" North frowned. "Is than not proof enough?"

"No, it isn't!" Bunnymund said back defiantly.

Tooth tried to mediate. "Wouldn't it be smart to just stay on our toes and prepare for the worst?"

"But worst has come!"

"Well, you're gonna need more proof than that to convince me, North!"

"What more could you possibly want? Another genocide? An attack on innocent children?"

"Now boys, calm down! Let's just talk this through!"

They began to bicker in earnest now. Meanwhile, the Sandman was trying to catch everyone's attention. The skylight above them was opening, revealing the full moon overhead. The Man in the Moon only ever opened it when he had to show the Guardians something of importance.

Sandy waved his arms, but to no avail. Then he proceeded to making small arrows pointing up over his head, but Tooth accidentally destroyed them with the flick of a wing. Peeved and very much annoyed, Sandy tried more flashy images. Again, ignored.

Then he saw a random elf wandering along while eating a cookie. Really now, they weren't even in the North Pole and those things managed to find a way into every place in the world. Without a second thought, Sandy grabbed it by the hat and shook the poor creature as hard as he could. With everyone finally acknowledging his existence, the Sandman dropped a very dizzy, confused elf and pointed a golden finger straight up at the moon.

"Ah, of course! We should ask Man in Moon!" North chuckled. "Why didn't you say something Sandy?"

The Sandman's face was clearly angry; two sandy clouds of steam erupted from his ears, but by then no one was paying attention. Their gazes were directed to the screen in front of them at the top of the stairs.

North spoke. "Manny, forgive us for our rudeness. What do you think should we do?"

"Your rudeness is forgiven. In desperate times, we often allow our emotions to dictate our actions. I feel, though, that our forces are too small. Perhaps it is time to assign a new guardian to this task at hand," said MiM carefully.

Tooth perked up a bit. "A new Guardian? Really? Oh, I'm so excited! Who could it be?"

"No offense," cut in Bunnymund, "but I think we can handle Pitch. We were able to last time. How could this be any different?"

MiM sighed. "I sense a great disturbance in the peace to the far north where even our Guardians dare not step foot. It is here that Pitch dwells. He is stronger than ever, youngest of my guard. I

fear his power grows with the help of an ally. It would be unwise to go and complete this task without more help."

"You have chosen who?" North asked gravely.

"Please not the Groundhog, Please not the Groundhog," muttered the Pooka under his breath.

The moon above them began to glow more so than ever. Slowly, its light began streaming in from the large skylight overhead. The four Guardians stood and stared as the hazy outline of a figure began to form and then become clear. Each held a different expression "North: wonder, Tooth: excitement, Sandy: curiosity, Bunny: pure, undiluted, absolute horror. The image was very clear; a young boy, just a teen really, with messy hair and a mischievous grin. Everyone recognized him immediately.

"I take it back," Bunny said within a second. "Groundhog's fine."

North, on the other hand, gave the figure a considerate look, one hand resting on his bearded chin. "Jack Frost? Truly? You think he's ready, Manny?"

"Yes. I feel it is his time."

The Pooka huffed and crossed his arms across his chest. "I'm tellin' ya, it's not."

"Oh, come on Bunny! Why don't we give him a chance?" asked Tooth.

"And I'm saying why give him a chance? Since when has this bloke every given a damn about children? For all we know he would compromise the mission and blow us all off without a second thought, just like he's done to society for the last three hundred years!"

Tooth was adamant. "But we can help him. It's not like he'll become a Guardian overnight. He just needs a little guidance. I bet he's got a really caring center, and I'd like to be there when he finds it! Am I right, ladies?"

The small gaggle of fairies twittered amongst themselves and nodded. Sandy seemed to agree, nodding along with them, but Bunnymund just rolled his eyes. "Whatever. But when it comes to accepting this bloody frostbite here, I'm out."

Then the Man in the Moon spoke. "Are you saying you would go against my word, Guardian of Hope?"

Bunnymund paled. He hadn't expected that. It looked as though he really didn't have a choice on the matter. Sighing dejectedly, the Pooka admitted defeat. "Forget it. We'll have to accept that devil of a boy, I guess."

North laughed and clapped the Pooka quite painfully on the shoulders. "That's the spirit! We will find Jack Frost and have him swear to sacred duties of Guardians, _da_?"

They felt the agreement of the Man in the Moon, a smile in his voice. "You will find many things that trouble young Jack's mind. Do not push him to tell you, for he needs to open up on his own. Give him time, and perhaps he will become another good friend for us to have.

"You will find him in the neighboring town of Burgess. He will be the one to guide you on this journey. Now go! And my Guardians, good luck to you all."

With that, MiM's presence vanished from behind the screen. The Guardians gathered together. North laughed his jolly laugh, the bellowed, "Everyone to my workshop. We're taking the sleigh!"

For the third time that day, Bunny felt the color drain from his face. "You're kiddin' me. Not that bloody vehicle!"

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><p>Part 2 â€" The Vikings

Berk: Hiccup's POV

This is Berk. It's twelve days north of Hopeless and a few degrees south of Freezing to Death. It's located solidly on the Meridian of Misery. My village. In a word? Sturdy. It's been here for seven generations, but every single building is new. For good reason, too.

The bad thing is that we've got a problem to a magnitude that no one can write off as just pests. You see, most places have mice or mosquitoes, but we've got _dragons_. Most people would leave. Not us. We're Vikings. We have stubbornness issues. That's why we're still here on Berk, battling it out with a bunch of oversized, fire-breathing reptiles.

And then the dragon tries to burn down my house. I barely managed to escape before the whole doorframe is engulfed in flames. See why there're so many new houses here?

My name's Hiccup. Great name, I know. But, it's not the worst. My cousin got stuck with Snotlout after all. Parents believe a hideous name will frighten off gnomes and trolls. Like our charming Viking demeanor wouldn't do that. If one were to see us at first, the sight might even be comical, but we know better. You have to have a certain degree of toughness to live up here. Everyone in this village has seen their fair share of death. I know I have.

Still, there's just some sort of energy in the air during a raid that you don't get anywhere else. And for a boring life in Berk, a bit of flair comes in handy. I couldn't help but ignore all the shouts to get back inside, instead running to the very midst of the action.

Then I almost got killed by a Nightmare (not that it's the first time _that's_ happened).

"Hiccup!" I was lifted by the scruff of my neck as it came whizzing by, burning the path I was just about to walk in flames. "What are you doing out? Get back inside!"

Stoick the Vast, chief of Vikings, turned me so I was facing him. He stood a good two heads taller than me and was at least three times wider than my sticky frame. His fierce face was masked by an enormous red beard, but nothing could mask the raw Vikingness burning in his eyes.

"Inside was just scorched," I retaliated.

"Well thenâ€¦" The chief became thoughtful; this wasn't a good sign. "Find another 'inside.'"

"Aw, c'mon! I want to help!"

"It would help all of us if you weren't running around while dragons are attacking," he said firmly. When he saw my face fall, though, he loosened up a bit. "Alright, I'll make you a deal. You are allowed out tonight only if you stay with Gobber, you hear?"

I grumbled; Gobber never left the forge. But I agreed. It's not like I had a choice in the matter.

Stoick smiled a bit. "I understand yer wanting to help, but we need all the younger ones, including you, safe, and you know it. Stay in the forge and try not to cause a disaster."

I honestly hate being treated like I can't make my own decisions, but who am I to go against him of all people. I haven't done anything significant with my life as of now, except disappointing everyone who was forced to come in contact with me. Hence my nickname: Hiccup the Useless.

Unlike the chief, of course. It was said that Stoick the Vast popped a dragon's head clean off its shoulders when he was still a babe. Do I believe it? Yes, I do.

I heard him making damage assessments with my uncle, who's second in command, while I ran straight to the forge where Gobber the Belch was waiting. By this time, the Vikings were lighting giant torches, each taller than the tallest buildings here. Gobber barely looked up to acknowledge my existence.

"So they finally got rid of ya, did they?" he asked as I hopped over the counter and into the fiery forge. "I thought you'd been carried off by a dragon or something!"

I smiled; friendly banter was common around him. "What, me? Naw, I was waaaaay too muscular for their taste. They didn't know what to do with allâ€¦this!" For show, I lifted an anvil (which was really heavy, mind you) and upon successful completion waved my arms at my figure in flourish. I even flexed a bit.

Gobber scoffed, barely looking up as a fresh wave of Vikings threw dented weapons into the shop. "Well, a dragon could always use toothpicks now, couldn't it?"

Gobber is the forge master here in Berk, a meathead with interchangeable hands. I've been his apprentice since I was littleâ€¦well, littler. He made an odd sight at best. One of the few Vikings that shaved, he had no beard but an impressively long

mustache to make up for it. Gobber is just one of those people who's always missing parts â€" his tooth, his arm, his leg, his undies, and (I swear) his common sense.

He's an interesting character, to say the least. For starters, he's one of the few people who can call himself the chief's friend. Also the only 'cripple' to still be alive and kicking. Years ago, he lost his left hand and right leg to dragon raids, which he proudly tells anyone who'll listen. Unfortunately, it's usually only me around long enough to hear the story to the full extent. I could probably recite it from top to bottom in my sleep.

While I worked I watched the drama outside. Observing this newest raid unfold, I couldn't help but think about before. Dragons used to never attack Berk. Well, they did, but not with the frequency they do now. Back when Stoick first became chief, before I was born, the dragons would come maybe once every three months and leave with some of our sheep and a few buildings burning. In retaliation, we Vikings would send out fleets of boats to try and locate their nest. The logic: if we can destroy their nest, they have to leave.

Of course, no one has ever found the nest, and that's just the tip of the iceberg. In fact, no one's even gotten close. That doesn't stop us though. The chief's led at least half the expeditions out to sea. With him there, there were a lot fewer casualties.

But then the dragons escalated.

Since I was about five, the attacks became more frequent. Once every two weeks at times, though usually it's spaced out more, like three to five weeks. Still, death tolls soared as the raids became more violent. Then the unthinkable happened.

You may be wondering why I'm one of six young Vikings at my age. That's right, six; just me, Fish, Snot, Ruff, Tuff, and Astrid. Well, it's quite simple. Ever since I was seven or so, the dragons began taking children back with them. They never killed them in Berk â€" I remember hearing my friends and fellow villagemates crying as they were taken away â€" but no one knows what the dragons do with the kids. We sent out even more fleets at first, trying to find the missing children, but to no avail. Now, the others and I are lucky to be alive still.

We don't know why only children are targeted. Once a Viking turns eighteen, the dragons no longer hold any interest. They always go for the younger one too, so I'm usually safe. But my dad still wants me to stay inside. All I want to do is help.

Like the others. All who were outside in the chaos. Fishlegs, my cousin Snotlout, the twins Ruffnut and Tuffnut, and Astrid.

I sigh, watching them do their duties. Odin, their job is so much cooler than mine. They actually get to go out and do things, like guide the injured to safety or put out fires. And me? Well, I just sit behind closed doors wishing to get out. Forced to watch them from the forge's booth. Unless I could sneak outâ€|

"Oh, no you don't," said Gobber, easily grabbing and lifting me by my shirt.

"Aw, come on, let me out, please?" I whined (but not in a babyish way). "I need to make my mark."

"Oh, you've made plenty of marks! All in the wrong places! You'll be making no marks, not today at least. Yer to stay in here like yer father said."

"C'mon!" I repeated. "Please, two minutes! I'll kill a dragon, and my life will get infinitely better."

The Viking laughed for real this time. "And what could you possibly achieve this time? You can't lift a hammer, you can't swing a sword. You can't even throw one of these!"

He held up bolas with his hand. And as if on cue, another Viking grabbed them from Gobber and expertly threw them at a passing Gronkle, who immediately fell to the ground like a boulder. Damn, he did have a point there. I could make weapons, but using them was a bit rusty.

Thankfully I was prepared for that. "Okay, fine. But this'll throw it for me."

It was a catapult-like contraption I designed. It there's one think I pride myself for it's my craftiness. Working in the forge for the last couple of years has really helped me with designing and creating new weapons. This latest design was a cross between a catapult and a crossbow, complete with an aiming gauge and a trigger. Through testing it out last week, I was able to shoot a rock with pinpoint accuracy at least twelve or fourteen _faÃ°mr_ to a nearby tree. Foolproof.

Of course the thing had to malfunction and send a hard metal hat flying into an unfortunate Viking who just happened to drop off his sword. Square in the forehead too, I might add. This obviously didn't help my case.

Gobber waved his prosthetic arm in my face. "See, this right here is exactly what I'm talkin' about!"

"It's just a minor calibration issue," I said quickly to my defense, but to no avail.

"Look, if you want to go out there and fight dragons, you'll have to stop being allâ€|" He hesitated, giving me a onceover before opening both hands palms up towards me. "This."

"You just gestured to all of me," I huffed, annoyed. This was a frequent occurrence for me around adults.

"Exactly!" said Gobber. "Stop being all of you and maybe you'll have a chance at going out there!"

That was the last straw. "Ooooooooooh no!"

"Oho, yes!" he responded.

We glared each other in the eyes, narrowing in them in unison.

"You sir," I began, "are playing a very dangerous game, keeping all

with _raw_ _Vikingness_ contained. There will be consequences!"

"I'll take my chances," he said, deadpan, before tossing a very heavy broadsword into my arms. I tried not to 'oof' too obviously. "Sword," he commanded. "Sharpen. Now."

Okay, so maybe that really didn't go quite the way I had anticipated, but it was a start. Still, swords didn't sharpen themselves. I set the blade on the sharpening stone, watching the sparks fly as the wheel spun, thinking of the day I would have a chance to prove myself. Because killing a dragon means everything here.

A Nadder head is sure to get me at least noticed. Gronkles are tough; taking down one of those would definitely get me a girlfriend. A Zippleback? Exotic. Two heads, twice the status. Then there's the Monstrous Nightmare. Only the best Vikings go after those. They have this nasty habit of setting themselves on fire. But the ultimate prize is the dragon no one's ever seen. We call it theâ€œ

Suddenly, the sound of said dragon shooting through the air at unknown high speeds filled the night air. It was as though both dragons and Vikings had stopped with its approach. I rushed over to catch a glimpse.

The silence was broken by a shout. "NIGHT FURY!"

"Get down!"

This thing never steals food, never grabs a child, never shows itself, and never misses. In the distance, a tower exploded with purple flames as the dragon flew by. No one has ever killed a Night Fury. Ever. And that's why I'm going to be the first.

There were shouts from the distance after the Night Fury swooped away. Things were looking desperate. Gobber seemed to have thought so too. He was changing his hand from the usual forging tongs to an ax. "Man the forge, Hiccup," he ordered. "They need me out there."

As if on second thought, he turned back around. "Stay. Put. There."

I gave him my most blank expression.

"You know what I mean." And with a ferocious battle cry, Gobber hobbled off.

Now was my chance!

Grabbing the nearest bolas in sight, I hung them around my neck and took the handles of my invention in my hands. Before long, I was running up the path towards the forests, the exact opposite direction from the rest of the villagers. Ignoring the snide comments and commands coming at me from left and right, I shouted random apologies and made my way up to the tallest hill. Thank the gods I decided to put wheels on my shooting device.

At the very top of the hill, at the edge of the cliff, I planted the break (because I put one of those in there too) and let the machine do its work. It opened and unfolded from its original cannon shape to

a crossbow. I loaded the bolas and pulled back. This was it; just one shot.

Silence.

The night seemed to be taunting me. I just focused on the stars. If one looked closely, they could see the outline of a dragon based on the shadow that passed over them. Honestly, was I the only one who'd thought of that?

There was no wind, only the distant sounds of fighting. I ignored them. The hairs on the back of my neck were standing up. There had to be something out there.

"C'mon, give me something to shoot at, give me something to shoot at," I muttered under my breath like a mantra.

As if the gods had heard my prayers, I heard the sound of wings. Fast. Could it be?

A shadow passed over the stars to my left. Black wings, silent and swift. I couldn't believe my eyes (or my ears, for the matter). It was! A Night Fury! The air seemed to shriek with its approach.

As I aimed, a burst of purple flames lit up the platform in front of me. I saw its outline swoop up from the damage it had just caused. I didn't even stop, let alone to think; I just pulled the trigger. The kickback sent me flying on my backside, but I heard the snap of the rope from the trap as it met its target. A shriek of a dragon, one I'd never heard before, filled the night sky. As I stood up I watched a black shape shoot into the forest on the adjacent island. Just over Raven's Peak; I'd have to remember that.

I shakily got to my feet and stood there for half a second. It worked! I could hardly believe it. I couldn't help but celebrate a bit. "I-I did it! Yes! Ha ha, did anyone see that?"

Enter the worst thing possible: a very angry looking Monstrous Nightmare.

"Except for youâ€¦!"

Okay, I'll admit it, I screamed. But it wasn't a girly scream or anything! It was a highly respectable sound ofâ€¦very slight fear ofâ€¦being eaten or something. Whatever it was, I just hoped no one heard me. The last thing I need is to be branded both useless _and_ a scaredy-cat.

I ran back towards the village as fast as my shaking feet could carry me. The dragon breathed fire at me twice, missing me by an arms length each time. Seeing the nearest thing to a shield, which happened to be one of the large wooden pillars that held up the torches, I scrambled behind it and held my breath. The next jet of fire engulfed the area around both sides.

I had to check if the coast was clear. Of course I had to look around the pillar the wrong way when trying to find a Nightmare that was about to eat me. I felt its rancid breath on my left shoulder. Naturally, I tensed, ready to accept my fate. By the gods, I wasn't ready to die yet!

Well, I didn't die if that's what you thought. No, instead a figure whizzed by my ear and tackled the dragon. I turned just in time to see Stoick the Vast tip his cap back into place. The Monstrous Nightmare tried to breathe fire back, but only a few molten rocks came out of its mouth. It belched, I swear it did!

Stoick growled, "Yer all out," before proceeding to punch the dragon with his bare hands. The Nightmare obviously didn't want to deal with an angry Viking chief. It squawked a bit before taking off and returning to wherever it came from.

Once it had left, the chief turned all his attention to the person hiding behind the smoldering pillar. Me. And then was the perfect time for it to collapse. Not only that, but the torch had to break off and roll/smash its way through the most undamaged bridge and houses in the village.

Oh, and there's one last thing you might want to know.

As the sounds of the giant torch making its way through the village came shrieking back at me I cringed, unable to meet the chief's disapproving gaze. I knew I wouldn't hear the end of it, especially when we got home.

"Sorry," I said weakly to the chief, "Dad."

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><p>Wow, Hiccup's part of the chapter came out a lot longer than I thought it would. Oh well, what good is it to hold back writing? There you have it. Thoughts? Please review; I'm really looking forward to writing this one, so any feedback would be good feedback, eh?

Being an AU, I apologize for the slight spinoff of country names. Especially to the Russians (because I know 'Russki' was what they were dubbed by Americans during the USSR's days). No offenses were intended!

By the by, any differences in the text from the movies to my writing are on purpose; I wanted to incorporate the original, but not copy it completely. That, and I was too lazy to pop in my HTTYD DVD and watch it for the thirtieth-ish time, or spend my Christmas money and go to the movies to rewatch RotG. Sorry.

Whatever, eh? I apologize for the excessively long author's notes. Until next chapter (when Jack and Toothless make their grand appearances)!

Sushi

2. Choices That Cause Change

_Welcome to another installment guys! Wow, I can't believe I've already written it. I will say this only once: this chapter came out really really really long, so please don't read if you don't have time or don't like ridiculously long (i.e. 8000+ words) chapters. Thanks! _

So this finally gets to Jack Frost (because he's awesome and stuff~) and Toothless ('cause who can hate the most adorable dragon of all time?). Please note that I'm going to be changing POV frequently in the future. Basically, if it's not from Jack's or Hiccup's standpoint, it'll be in third. That, or if I really don't feel like writing a part in first. Depends on how I feel.

Whatever. You probably don't want to hear me complain. Read on! Enjoy~

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><p>2 " Choices That Cause Changes

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><p>Part 1 " The Guardians

Burgess: Jack's POV

Night had just fallen in Burgess.

Already the Sandman's dream sand was floating through the air. I knew he'd be floating over the main pavilion nearby as always, but I wasn't in the mood to talk to him. I knew he'd probably listen to whatever I had to complain about with that pitying look in his eyes. Today was not that day.

Today marked another failed attempt to be seen. I'm getting ahead of myself. But you can't blame me; I've been around for a long time. Things can get a bit jumbled up if you're not too careful.

My name is Jack Frost. I was 'born' three hundred years ago in the middle of winter from the bottom of a lake. Crazy, I know, but bear with. I'll explain.

Darkness—that was the first thing I saw. Yes, I was at the bottom of said lake. It was cold and dark. I couldn't breathe. I was scared. But then I saw the moon. It was so big and bright, and—somehow, it chased all the fear away. Suddenly, I wasn't afraid anymore.

I floated up to this moon; the ice above me parted as I surfaced. I drifted over the frozen lake, high above the trees in the forest (this lake was in the middle of a forest), and the moon spoke to me. Well, the Man in the Moon did.

Your name is Jack Frost, child of winter.

He only ever said that one thing; I've never heard from him since.

When I floated back down onto the ice, it froze under me. I didn't know why or how, but I didn't care. Taking a step forward, I stumbled upon a staff. It's an interesting piece of wood, twisting up into a shepherd's crook at the end. When my foot tapped it, though, it frosted over. I picked it up.

The thing seemed ordinary enough until a jet of ice shot out of the end. I let go of it in shock. From where it hit on the ice

fern-patterned frost spread its way out like leaves in the spring. I was curious, so I picked it up again. The ice continued to form around me wherever I guided the staff.

I laughed. Then I was running across the ice, cloak on my shoulders billowing behind me. Within seconds, I was dashing into the snowy banks. My feet were bare, my clothes thin, but I didn't feel the cold. It was comfortable. The snow on the ground glittered like millions of stars from where the beams of moonlight hit it. The birch trees surrounding the lake rose up to meet the sky.

I tapped the nearest tree. Frost immediately covered it. That was beyond cool. So I went around from tree to tree, forming frost everywhere I went. C'mon, you stumble across magical wood; what else would you do with it?

Then I figured out that I could control the wind. Which means 'flight' in simple language. Took me fifty years to master it, but lemme say it's totally worth the time. But that's not what this story's about. With this newfound ability, I tried to fly, but I hit more than a few trees in my initial attempt.

It took several minutes for me to stay upright while flying. By the time I got the hang of it, it was much darker. But it was okay because I saw a village in the distance. I flew/crashed/skidded into the place, laughing as I did. Everyone ignored me. No surprise there, I was acting like a lunatic or something. Probably didn't want to catch whatever I had.

"Hey," I said to the first woman I saw. She ignored me. A man walked by. I smiled. "Hi, how's it going?" Again, ignored.

A young boy was running towards me, so I crouched down in front of him. "Hi, would you mind telling me where I am?"

And he ran through me.

It's not like Harry Potter, where it's uncomfortable cold to run through a ghost or anything. But something about having a child run through me was the most painful thing. Not a physical pain, per say, but a gut wrenching heart stopping sort of feeling.

I gasped. Suddenly there wasn't enough air. Person after person walked through me without a second glance, going on with their lives. And then I realized just how alone I was.

I looked up to the moon, so full and bright, and asked, "Why? Why am I here? What am I supposed to do?"

But he never replied. I've never heard the Man in the Moon since.

After that day, I've tried everything to be noticed by someone living. Anyone, really. But nothing's ever worked. So now you know. And this is where my story starts.

My usual choice of stay is Burgess. It's the small town that popped up less than a mile from the lake I was born from, so I guess I consider it the closest thing to home. Though it neighbors the trade city and capital-of-our-world Central, it still keeps that quaint

small-village feel I love about it. Most of the homes are bi-level wood with fireplaces and the likes, but they still have modern conveniences like electricity and stuff. No major transportation except for the occasional sky rail to the capital. People still walk here, which is a relief.

It means I can freeze the sidewalks and cobblestone without them noticing. Telephone lines covered in icicles, snow on every available surface, watching children play (in a non-pedophile way). It's the life! And I can truly say I've started more than a few amazing snowball fights.

But with this comes pain.

Like I said, I've been trying to make a kid see me for three hundred years, and I still haven't managed that. All I want is to be believed in; is that really too much to ask? I mean, I don't even get brownie points for trying or anything. It's like I don't exist.

Today, I tried again. Fruitlessly. There's this kid in Burgess named Jamie, about ten-or-so-years-old, who completely and full heartedly believes in supernatural beings. As in legendary beings like Santa Clause and the Easter Bunny, whom I know exist. I have many good memories of frosting up their holidays. But those are stories for another time.

Jamie also has a strong pull to the ancient Norse mythology and I don't really know what it's about, but I find it intriguing. Thinking I had a chance with Jamie, I brought with me a snow storm by wind. It's difficult, but I can control winter weather to a pretty major degree. Every first winter storm in the far north is brought by yours truly. This time, the wind carried enough to bring about a snow day.

It was good fun. Started a snowball fight, froze my lake enough for skating without the danger of falling through thin ice, and made the most epic sledding path of my life. Jamie shot through the streets of Burgess like a bullet. Past shop windows, through snowy banks by the roads, between the legs of shoppers, even over a ramp made of ice. Unfortunately, he was hit by a mail carrier pigeon head-on, but he was laughing all the same so I guess I did good.

The only thing was that he lost a tooth. And he seemed to forget all about the fun we just had, instead shouting to his friend, "I lost a tooth! Oh man, maybe I'll see the Tooth Fairy this time."

My anger and jealousy boiled. Again, I was overshadowed by them: the one the kids believe in. I knew they were of the Moonlight Guard, forever in service to the Man in the Moon to protect people's rights or something like that. Let's just say I'm not exactly a goody two-shoes like those guys probably are. It really gets to a fellow after a while, not being noticed.

"Thanks for nothing," I said to the full moon (because it's always shining full and bright and pissing me off). As always, it offered me no reply.

I sighed. Even with this pain, I know I'll usually stick around Burgess if I'm not feeling in the mood to create a snowstorm elsewhere. Tonight was one of those nights. Then a thought came to me

and I grinned. Suddenly I was feeling more Central.

Why? Well, it's quite simple. There are two major ports in Central: the Sea and the Sky. Anyone's allowed down at Sea, but the Sky is (and has always been) strictly off-limits to those without governmental consent. Let's just say I've managed around that bit more than a few times. But the real prize up there is past the gates in the very back. They're heavy wooden double doors constantly guarded by big furry creatures known as yeti. They're from the far north is all I know.

It's said that behind those closed doors is a portal that leads to another dimension no one but an elite member of the Moonlight Guard is given access to. Even those in the guard are jealous of the special rights these select few have, at least from what I've heard while spying on the local taverns.

I needed a bit of fun that night. And what could be more fun than trying to break into the most secure area in the world? When you're an immortal who isn't seen by children (like me), it's only the best kind of fun!

I jumped straight up into the sky, knowing that the wind would be there to carry me. "Wind! Take me to Central!" And it did just that.

Central: The Sky Docks (Jack's POV)

It was late, so most of the docks were abandoned. That, or the guards were drunk or asleep at their posts. All in all, it wasn't hard to make my way up to the Sky Port. Though I'd been there several times it still amazes me. The ships there are huge! At least as large as those that came from Angleria when the Amerikanas were first discovered and settled on. Unlike those, though, they fly. No longer are man trapped on land and sea; there is a new frontier for them: the Skies.

No one knows where the ships come from, but my suspicions lie with the yetis. They bring the parts in every week from where the portal is located. Curiosity kills the best of people. Yes, including me. I want to know what goes on back there. Tonight was the night I would do just that.

As I snuck through on the rooftops of random building, something caught my attention. From under one of the lampposts was a sudden flash. As if something big ran past. Again, my curiosity got the best of me. I jumped down from the roof and followed the shadow. I wasn't sure what it was and I'm not the kind of guy to take risks—too often, anyway.

Left, right, right, right, left again, past three abandoned warehouses. By the time the thing managed to evade my sight, I was standing at a dead end. I could've flown out of there, but something kept me there. As though I recognized this dark presence.

"Ya shouldn't be here mate."

I gasped and turned, staff pointed at the source of the voice. From the shadows came a figure I didn't recognize at first, but as he stepped out I immediately knew who he was, though he wasn't the thing

I had initially been following. The moonlight gleamed off of his grey fur and outlined the black tattoos along his arms.

His grass green eyes glared at me, a boomerang pointed at me threateningly. "It's been a while. Blizzard of '68, wasn't it? Easter Sunday."

"Bunny!" I said, leaning against my staff casually. "You're still not mad about that, are you?"

"I am, but this is about something more important than that. Guys."

Suddenly, I felt a very large hand on my shoulder. Before I had a chance to turn I was shoved roughly into a sack. I struggled against the material (it was soft; felt?) to no avail. I heard the warbling of the creature that grabbed me. A yeti. Dammit Bunny, even that was too harsh for revenge.

The sound of wind filled my ears from around me, but this wasn't natural wind. I could tell. It sounded almost like a howling vortex. A portal. Why a portal? Then it hit me. I must've been near the secret portal in the port! And now I would never see it! Damn, this day was going from bad to worse.

"No way am I going through that bleeding thing!" Bunny was shouting. "I'll take my own rabbit hole. See you back at the North Pole."

So they were taking me to North's home? I didn't have time to dwell on that thought. I heard Bunny give the command and then the gut-wrenching feeling of being thrown filled my body. I was spinning faster and faster. And then everything stopped.

North Pole: Santoff Claussen (Jack's POV)

Though it was still dark inside the sac, I heard the whispering of voices. Of course it took me 'til then to find the opening.

"Oh look, there he is," said a gleeful female.

"Elves, quit crowding! Give out guest some room!" A heavy Russki accent. So I really was at the North Pole after all. "Ah, here he is!"

I opened the bag slowly to see three pudgy little faces watching curiously. They were funny looking things really, with large brown eyes and button noses. The elves jingled away like little red triangles as I shucked the cloth off from around my shoulders and crawled out.

"Jack Frost!" greeted a booming voice, thick with his northern accent. The owner of the voice was just as strong in build. He stood a good half foot over me with a wide chest and belly. Muscular arms were crossed over his chest, tattoos peeking out from his red jacket's sleeves. His trademark white beard made him immediately recognizable.

"Santa?" I asked, hardly believing my eyes. He smiled back at me. "Wowâ€¦"

"I hope the yetis treated you well," North said.

"Yeah, I just love being shoved in a sac and thrown through a magic portal!" I said, voice dripping with sarcasm.

Unfortunately, that went straight over Jolly Old St. Nick's head. He chuckled and replied, "Oh good. That was my idea."

By then, though, I wasn't paying attention. Though I'd never been there, I knew immediately this had to be Santoff Claussen, the secret base in the North Pole. The first hint was that there were gaggles of elves everywhere. Literally everywhere. I turned and there were another few just standing around. Experimentally, I took my staff and froze one. It toppled over, to my utmost entertainment. Don't worry, I unfroze it—eventually.

The second were the yetis. They too were everywhere, and everyone knew that yetis only lived really far north. The third was the large globe before me. Each city in the world has one such globe, with a single light shining where they were. This globe was different, though. This one has thousands of tiny golden lights all over it. Most shone with a bright persistence, but some were flickering slightly.

"I see you've already met Bunny," North said, interrupting my thoughts. Bunnymund scowled at me from the shadows of a pillar. I gave him a head nod. "And this is Sandy. Sandy? Sandy, wake up!"

The Sandman jolted out of his peaceful slumber. Bunny rolled his eyes. I waved and he smiled with a little golden hand. I couldn't help but smile back. Sandy's happiness is somewhat contagious. Maybe that's why I always liked talking to him after a bad day.

"And this is Tooth."

Without warning a green, turquoise, purple, yellow something attacked my face.

"Hello, Jack! Oh, it's so good to meet you! I'm Toothiana, but everyone calls me Tooth. I've heard so much about you—and your teeth. Lemme see." She said this all in a blur while hovering a foot above the floor and shoving her fingers in my mouth simultaneously. "Oh, how beautiful! They're so clean, and white! Oh! They really do sparkle like freshly fallen snow!"

The throng of fairies hovering around her sighed dreamily, and a few of them even fainted. Okay, weird—

"Tooth," said North, "hands out of mouth."

"Oh, sorry!"

I knew the Tooth Fairy from a distance. She's one of those you know, but don't really know, ya know? No? Whatever. Tooth and her fairies are super elusive, so it's not like you ever see any of them ever. The little ones are all identical (feathery green-blue bodies, petite pink hands and feet, violet eyes, long beaks for noses, and mouths full of tiny perfect teeth). It's hard to think that Tooth used to be one like them before she became more blonde and human.

I laughed a bit. "I must have done something really bad to get you four together." Then it hit me. "Am I on the Naughty List?"

"Naughty List?" repeated North. "Ha! You hold the record."

Well, that was good to know.

Bunny snorted. "Trust me mate, if it were just about you and your listing, I wouldn't even bother coming to this meeting. But like I said, this is about more than just you. We're dealing with our nemesis enemy here."

"Ooh, dramatic," I teased, waving my hands in mock surrender.

"This is serious, Jack," said Tooth. "So serious it could put our lives, as well as millions of innocent others, in jeopardy."

"Woah, woah, hold up. Could somebody please explain what is going on here?"

The Sandman stepped forward eagerly. Images began flashing over his head with a feverish persistence, none of them making sense when strung together. I nodded slowly. "Thanks for playing Sandy, but I don't think I caught any of that."

North stepped forward as a very dejected Sandy stepped back. "I see fear is coming back to world. Pitch Black is here again. Very strong and very angry."

"The Boogeyman?" I was incredulous. Here we were after years of him being too weak to show his own face and now he was ready to make a frontal attack on all the goodness the world held? Really? No, that was impossible. I couldn't help but scoff. "You're joking, right?"

"I know it's hard to believe," said North, "but it is truth. Which is why you must join us and become Guardian!"

"Hold up!" They stopped and stared, smiles fading. "You're the legendary Guardians? The elite of the Moonlight Guard? You've got to be kidding me!"

Tooth fluttered over with a smile. "But it's the truth!"

"So you're all, like, super skilled warriors and stuff too, like the rumors?"

They all nodded. I just shook my head slowly. Impossible. All these years I'd been bugging the crap out of these guys who each had enough power to practically kill an immortal. My mind was blown.

"Let us skip details for now," said North firmly. "First, we must have you swear to sacred oath to become Guardian! Music!"

Then the elves began marching in time, all carrying and playing an instrument. It was like some medieval fanfare. All I noticed were their bells jingling in time. A few of them scuttled over to North with a giant golden book balanced on their heads. I gave Bunnymund a horrified look. He just shrugged as if to say, 'This happened to me. Just deal with it.'

"Wait, this is best part!" he squealed. I'm tellin' ya, that guy squealed.

The music fanfared and crescendoed (fake words, I know, but bear with me). Those stupid looking elves marched around me in a perfect circle as North took the large, ornate book and began to open it. No way! Did they seriously think I was going to take their stupid oath?

Taking my trusty staff, I knocked the butt of it as hard as I could on the tile floor. Ice immediately spread from where it contacted and caused widespread confusion among the elves. The music faltered and died as their panic spread. North looked up. "Music!"

"No! No music!" I shouted as the elves began to play again. To prove my point, I kicked the nearest unfortunate elf, who skidded into the one in front of it, causing a huge chain reaction. One of the elves with a tuba threw it on the ground and ran off angrily. Someone obviously didn't like me raining on their parade (or would it be snowing?).

"What makes you think I wanna be a guardian?" The four of them stared at me as if I was mental.

"Told ya," muttered Bunny to North.

North, though, seemed confused. "But why not?"

And here I thought it was pretty obvious. "You don't want me. You're all hard work and deadlines! I'm... snowballs and fun times. I'm not a Guardian."

"But Jack, I don't think you truly understand what it is we do," said Tooth.

"Enlighten me," I said.

North walked past me to the globe. On it were thousands of shining lights. Like I said earlier, many shone true, though some were flickering slightly. "Each dot on this globe represents a child who believes in us. And good or bad, naughty or nice, it is our job to protect them. We have done so for years, but now Pitch threatens their safety."

"So what's any of this got to do with me?" I asked.

"Because you were chosen to be next Guardian!"

"By who's orders?"

"Why, Man in Moon, of course!"

"Wait," I said, unable to keep the hurt out of my voice, "he talks to you guys?" Really? After I'd been trying to get one word out of him for hundreds of years? Noâ€¦impossibleâ€¦

Bunny then said, "I don't thing MiM likes wasting time with hopeless cases like you."

"Whatever you say, Kangaroo." I even rolled my eyes for the effect.

"What did you say?" He hopped over to me and glared me straight in the eye. I glared right back at him. "I'm a bunny. The Easter Bunny."

I smirked. "Really? Because I thought you were a Pooka, but went with a kangaroo status. That whole Auslandian accent thing you've got going doesn't really help your case."

"Say that again," he growled.

"Why should I? Kan. Ga. Roo," I said, putting emphasis on each syllable.

He bristled. "Then tell me, since when have you ever cared about the happiness of children, Frost?"

"Well, there are these things called snow days." I stated sarcastically. "And I know it's not hard-boiled egg, but kids like them."

"Right, and I'm sure it's really worth it when the kids can't even see you."

He'd struck a chord. Everyone could tell. The yetis and Sandy exchanged looks. North was in some sort of shock. Tooth fluttered and tugged on Bunny's fur. "Bunny, I think you went too far!"

"No no," I interrupted. "Let the Kangaroo speak."

He bowed mockingly to me. "Thank you."

I returned the favor with a flourishing bow of my own. "So, what've you got to say?"

"I think," he said, "that this is all some sort of big joke to you. What the Guardians do is really important. And if you ever want to be seen and believed in, you might as well take this offer or leave and go back to your sulking. We don't have time for little buggers like you who don't give a damn."

"What makes you think I don't 'give a damn'?"

This was an honest question, but Bunny didn't think so.

"Well, if you ask me, all I see is an annoying bloke who likes being invisible to the world."

"You don't know what it's like!" I shouted. I hit my breaking point faster than I thought I would. "I've tried so hard to be seen! I've done everything! Everything, I tell you! And so far I've gotten nothing out of it. Nothing but more questions that need answering!"

The Guardians suddenly all gave me a pitying look (even Bunny), which sucked worse than a hot summer day. I turned, ready to fly out, but North caught me by the shoulder. He smiled down at me. "Walk with me, Jack."

Setting a brisk pace, he marched away. I took one fleeting look back at the others before leaving as well. What I saw next would literally take hours to explain, so here's the watered-down version.

Everywhere I looked, there were pillars full of hallways winding up. Confetti fell constantly from the sky while freshly wrapped presents whizzed up in crystal balls. Everywhere I turned, there were yetis working and elves being, well, dumb little elves. I found myself turning circles as I walked, unable to keep my mouth from hanging open. All of my earlier bitterness had died as I beheld more wonders.

"Keep up Jack! We're on tight schedule!"

"Slow down, would ya? I've been trying to bust in here for years. I want a good look." North gave me a horrified look. I laughed. "Whoa! Don't worry, security's tight here. Never got pass the yetis."

Distracted by the wonders to behold, I ran into a group of them. I recognized the scowling one immediately. "Oh, hey Phil."

"You know Phil?"

"Yeah," I said with a laugh. "Like I said, I've been trying to break in here for fifty years! You get to know the guards after a while. I never got past the gates, right Phil?"

The yeti just rolled his eyes and muttered something I didn't understand. North, however, did. He laughed his jolly laugh and led me through the door to his workshop. It closed behind us with a loud thud, barely a hair's breadth away.

I glared at the wood. "Thanks a lot!"

Of course the wood didn't reply, though I swore I heard the yetis laughing on the other side. But again, I soon forgot about my troubles.

This room was truly amazing. It was a small place especially for a man as big as North and was crammed with books, rolls of parchment, pens, loose sheets of paper, coloring utensils, tools, planks of wood, paints, and more than I could name in a limited amount of time. On the desk by the windows was a large train track with roller coaster loops made completely out of ice. A model train was flying around the room, icy steam puffing out from its top.

North smiled as an elf brought him food. He paused before offering me it. "Fruitcake?"

"Uh...no thanks?"

He deadpanned and threw it into the corner, where a group of elves began to devour it.

"I thought the elves did all the work around here," I said as I watched them eat.

"We let them think that," North whispered back, his smile returning. "As you know, I design the toys for children. The yetis build them. They also build all the ships in Central." So that explained why they came through the portal. "Jack, there is something I would like to show you."

He went to a cabinet towards the back of the room and pulled out something, which he tossed to me. I caught it with expert dexterity. Turning it, I saw it was a wooden doll that resembled North. A matryoshka from Roccia. I gave him an imploring look.

"This," he answered, "is me. Every piece of me. As you see, the first part is what is on the outside, what all people see. But open it upâ€|"

I did.

"â€|and there is a fierce warrior."

I continued to open as he explained each piece of him. "Yet there is a playful me. And one full of adventure. Loyalty. Determination. Mystery. But most important is my center. Go on, open it."

I did. In it was a tiny doll. I stared at it for a moment before replying, "A big-eyed baby?"

He laughed. "Close. This is the part of me that wonders. Always seeing new things, bigger and better. The one that has toys for kids. I see the world as what it could be."

And for a moment there, I could almost see it too, in that little workshop.

"That, Jack, is my center."

"I don't understand the point of thisâ€|"

"Simple. Every Guardian has a center. That center is something that every child has. I am the Guardian of their Wonder. And you have something too. That is why Man in Moon chose you."

I didn't know what to say. Honestly, I was at a loss of words. Finally I forced out, "But what is my center?"

North gave me a look that was so full of kindness and understanding I didn't know how to react. "You will find it. Soon, I think. I can feel itâ€|in my belly. Now Jack, do you understand what it means to be Guardian?"

"Not quite," I answered truthfully. "Butâ€|I'd like to find out. I thinkâ€|I think I'll tag along with you guys."

North smiled. "Excellent!"

* * *

><p>Part 2 â€" The Vikings

Berk: Hiccup's POV

Things weren't looking up for me. I stood with the rest of the villagers watching the dragons haul in their latest plunders. Thankfully, no children, though there were a couple of Nadders making off with a net full of bleating sheep. No doubt I would be blamed for that.

I watched them for a long moment before adding, "Okay, so I hit a Night Fury."

Dad grabbed me by the arm, dragging me to my fate. I tried to drag my feet and slow him down (to no avail). "It's not like the last few times, Dad. I really actually hit it! You guys were busy, and I had a very clear shot. It went down just past Raven's Peak. We should get a search party out there before it tries to esca-"

"Enough!" He sighed and lowered his voice, though the anger never left his eyes. "Enough, Hiccup. Every time you step outside, disaster strikes. Can't you see I have more important things to worry about? Winter is almost here and I have a whole village to feed."

I replied, "Well, between you and me I think the village could do with a little less feeding." Well, sarcasm was my first line of defense after all. Suddenly, there were several weight-conscience Vikings and a very angry chief.

"This isn't a joke. Gods, why can't you follow the simplest orders?"

"I-I can't help myself!" I cried. "I see a dragon and I want to justâ€¦|kill it, you know? It's who I am, Dad."

"You are many things Hiccup," he said wearily, "but a dragon killer is not one of them."

I looked down at my feet, shame coloring my face. It wasn't the first time I'd been embarrassed by all to see, but somehow this time was worse. This time, I was telling the truth and no one believed me.

"Gobber, take him back to the house," Stoick commanded. "I have this mess to clean up."

Gobber cuffed me lightly on the head. We walked back up the hill. Go figures I had to pass the others. Ruffnut was laughing her head off. Tuffnut, for once, wasn't arguing with her.

"I've never seen anyone mess up so bad before," he said.

"Thank you," I said sarcastically back.

Snotlout decided it was a good idea to butt in. "No no, that was good. It seriously helped."

I knew exactly what he was referring to: the title of future chief. Being my closest relative in my age group, if I was deemed unfit to become the next chief of Berk, the title would automatically be transferred to him. He obviously struck lucky considering I'm the most likely to die within the next few years due to my own stupidity.

Bitting back the urge to insult him, I just said as passively as possible. "Yeah, I was trying."

Gobber made up for it by knocking him over, but he and the others continued laughing. Only Astrid and Fishlegs weren't. The latter appeared nervous; we'd been close friends in early childhood, both of us being pretty poor Vikings. Astrid was much worse. She gave me a critical eye. I felt it bore into me until I rounded the corner.

By the time Gobber and I got back to the main house, the sun was rising and I was trying to defend myself.

"I really did hit it!"

"Of course you did." Meaning he didn't believe me in the slightest.

I thought of my dad. "He never listens!"

"It runs in the family," Gobber said, but I was barely listening. Anger does that to people.

"And when it does, it's always with this disappointed scowl. Like someone skimped the meat in his sandwich." Giving my best impersonations of Stoick, I puffed out my chest and said, "Excuse me, barmaid. I think you've brought me the wrong offspring. I ordered an extra-large boy with beefy arms, extra guts and glory on the side. This here, this is a talking fishbone!"

"Nay, yer taking this the wrong way. It's not so much what you look like, but what's on the _inside_ that he can't stand!"

Wow. Because that was supposed to make me feel better.

"Thank you for summing that up."

"Look." The way Gobber said it made me turn around. "You just need to stop trying to be something you aren't."

I knew he was trying to help, really he was, but his words stung. I've never cried in front of others, but I felt my voice crack a little. "I just want to be one of you guys!"

I closed the door shut behind me. Now wasn't the time to feel hurt. I knew I shot down a Night Fury, and I wasn't going to let a bad day (or night) get in the way of finding it. That was my mission; after tackling the toughest dragon on _Ygdrasil's_ branches, I could have a chance at a normal life. Perhaps I would be noticed by somebody. Hopefully Dad. Or Astridâ€¦

Grabbing the nearest weapon, which happened to be a dagger, from the table, I ran out the backdoor. Thank goodness there was one of those on this house. I don't think I would've been able to get out if Gobber hadn't left yet.

I tucked the dagger into my vest (every vest came with a few weapon holders) and pulled out my notebook. The leather-bound parchment was probably my most valuable possession. It contained all my notes and drawings, designs and maps. I flipped over to my rough sketch of

Raven's Peak and bookmarked the page with my charcoal pencil.

I had a Night Fury to find.

Berk: The Meeting Hall

"Either we finish them or they'll finish us!"

Stoick's voice echoed around the crowded hall. All two hundred and twelve able-bodied Viking men and women were there. He had called a meeting to discuss the newest problem: the last few raids. There were virtually no children left save the Elder's two grandchildren and the older teens. Their supplies were running drastically low, and the first winter freeze was due within a moon cycle. Stoick had one solution " stop the attacks for good.

"It's the only way we'll be rid of them. If we find the nest and destroy it, the dragons will leave. They'll be forced to find another home! Perhaps we'll be able to find out why they took out children!" He stabbed the map in front of him, which diagramed both Berk and the unknown area where the dragons dwelled, dramatically with his dagger. "One more search, before the ice sets in!"

"None of those ships ever come back!" shouted someone near the back.

"We're Vikings," stated his chief. "It's an occupational hazard. Now, who's with me?"

Hesitation. Many were beginning to make excuses of some sort: a sick wife (though all adults of fighting age were present), fear of drowning (though all could swim), lack of weapons (Hiccup and Gobber had repaired them all last night), and the likes. Stoick sighed; desperate times called for desperate measures.

"Very well. Those who stay have to look after Hiccup." Immediately every hand shot up, followed by a chorus of willingness. Stoick huffed, "That's more like it."

As the meeting simmered down and the rest of the Vikings left, Gobber looked up from his tankard of ale, yet another interchangeable hand (and of Hiccup's design). "I'll pack my undies."

Stoick came over and sat down next to him. "No, I need you to stay and train the kids. It's high time they learn the basics of dragon killing. They're almost adults now, after all, and the last batch of them, gods be good."

"Oh perfect. And while I'm busy Hiccup can cover the stall. Lots of razor-sharp blades, molten steel, and time to himself. What could possibly go wrong?" The sarcasm in the half-drunk Viking's voice was apparent.

Stoick sighed. "What am I going to do with him, Gobber?"

"Put him in training with the others."

"No, I'm serious."

"So am I."

"He'd be killed before you let the first dragon out of its cage."

"Oh, you don't know that."

"I do know that."

"No, you don't."

"No, actually, I do."

"No, you don't!" cut in Gobber loudly, seizing any conversation that could've followed.

Stoick seemed to admit defeat. The chief sighed and stood up, pacing. "You know what he's like. From the time he could crawl, he's beenâ€|different. He doesn't listen. He has the attention span of a sparrow. I take him fishing and he goes hunting forâ€|trolls or something!"

"Trolls exist!" Gobber shouted, before adding thoughtfully, "They steal your socks. But only the left ones. What's with that?"

Stoick ignored the comment about trolls. Instead, he walked over to the far wall near the fireplace. On this wall was a grand tapestry, the only thing that had survived all seven generations of Berk. Three hundred years of history. Along the borders were the images of various heroes and gods, but the center was of a Viking standing tall and proud. He was the first chief of Berk, and a roll model to all people in the village.

"When I was a boy-"

"Oh, here we go!" He'd heard this way too many times.

"â€|my father told me to bang my head against a rock and I did it. I thought it was crazy, but I didn't question him. And do you know what happened?"

Gobber was barely listening. As the story had started, his metal tooth popped out of his gum and fell straight to the bottom of his nearly-empty drink. He used his friend's distraction to his advantage, fishing out the prized fake while finishing his ale.

"You got a headache," he immediately responded, bored. Recovering his missing tooth, he tapped it back in gently with the bottom of the cup.

"That rock split in two." Stoick stood before the tapestry with a sense of pride. "It taught me what a Viking could do, Gobber. He could crush mountains, level forests, tame seas. Even as a boy I knew what I was, what I had to become. Hiccup is not that boy."

Gobber knew the chief well, having grown up with him since their early days. He knew many things that even the chief's own brother didn't seem to notice. The fact that Stoick still carried a heavy heart with the thought of his dead wife, Val. The fact that Stoick was insecure about anything not related to fighting. The fact that Stoick wanted to have a strong relationship with his only son, but

was unable to figure out how. The fact that even the great Viking chief Stoick the Vast needed guidance when it came to his family. And Gobber was willing to give him just that.

"You can't stop him, Stoick. He'll be sixteen next spring, an adult by the village traditions. And you know it. It's only a matter of time before he moves on and makes his own way through this world, with or without the blessings of the gods. You can only prepare him for whatever his future has in store. I know it seems hopeless, but the truth is that you won't always be around to protect him. He's going to get out there again. Hel, he's probably out there now!"

Stoick sat in stony silence and Gobber smiled. His job was done; at this rate, he would see Hiccup in the training ring the next morning. Finally, something good was going to come to that boy after all.

Raven's Point: Hiccup's POV

_Please be here. Please be here, _I silently prayed in my head before daring to open my eyes. Nothing but summer forests greeted my eager sight. I sighed and put yet another 'X' on my map. It'd been over an hour since I first left home and already I was losing all hope to redeem myself.

Exasperated, I scribbled out the page angrily and shut the book with a snap. I let out another heavy sigh. "Oh, the gods hate me. Most people lose their knife or mug, but no! I managed to lose an entire dragon!"

A nearby branch stuck out in my way tauntingly. I hit it heavily, only to have it snap right back into my eye. "Ow!" The gods really did hate me!

But then I noticed something amiss. The tree that the branch was hanging from was snapped in two, mauled and splintering as if Thor's mighty hammer had pierced it in half. From there, just past my foot, was a deep crevice that I knew wasn't there when I first mapped the area. Odin, could it be?

Offending branch forgotten, I slid down the dip and followed the trail of unearthed ground. The dirt was still moist from being previously buried, undoubtedly a fresh dig. As I continued, I saw claw marks. It looked as though whatever had dug through had done so at a high speed and tried to slow itself down. The marks were made on a tree root; there was still some sap dripping from the cut. Sharp and thick.

At the end of the skid marks was a small bump, almost like a miniature hill. I approached it and looked over, not expecting to find much of anything, maybe even some more markings. But it was there!

The Night Fury!

I gasped in shock and fear and a bit of anticipation, but my instinct to hide got the best of me and I ducked back behind the slope. Hearing no sounds of movement, I peeked back over. The dragon lay before me, bound and motionless. It was truly a majestic sight. In

the sun, its scales gleamed an inky black. One of its wings was half up, thin and flexible, but at the same time taunt. The dragon's head was, oddly enough, almost triangular. _Like a hawk, _I thought. Perhaps this was a reason for its speed! But now wasn't the time for observations.

Pulling the dagger out from my vest, I approached cautiously. It might be bound (or dead, for the matter), but one should never take a chance. Especially if that someone is Hiccup the Useless. The Night Fury didn't move.

The dagger relaxed at my side. No longer scared, I laughed airily. I had proof now! "My godsâ€|th-this fixes everything! Yes! I have taken down this mighty beast!"

Then the 'mighty beast' under me moved. I was too scared to scream, backpedaling until I stumbled and knocked against a nearby boulder. The Night Fury let out a nonhuman groan and began to breathe deeply. I would've thought it asleep had its eye not been open and regarding me coldly. The eye was something out of a nightmare; greener than any moss, flecked with browns and yellows, no visible whites, and a slit for a pupil.

The dragon neither moved nor blinked. It just regarded me. I found the will to stand again. My dagger was still clutched in my hand; I gripped it harder with both hands and moved back to the bound Night Fury. I stood up straight over it, taking a deep breath. I was not going to show fear here. Not when I was so close.

"I'm gonna kill you, dragon," I said slowly. "I'm gonna cut out your heart and take it to my father. I'm a Viking. I'm a Viking!"

The words echoed around the forest, which had become eerily silent. As if the Night Fury had understood what I said, it didn't bother to struggle as it'd probably done since being shot down. I held the dagger up over my head, but couldn't bring myself to bring it down. I looked down at the dragon. Its eye was still watching me, but with an emotion I couldn't identify. Fear? Despair? Acceptance? Could it really understand its own fate?

I shouldn't think about those things. I shut my eyes and brought the dagger back over my head. This time I would strike. This time, I would kill the dragon beneath me. My name would be known to all! I would become famous, the first Viking to ever kill a Night Fury!

The Night Fury let out a pitiful wail. I heard its black head rest upon the mossy ground and take its final breath. So closeâ€|just one swift downward cutâ€|

I stood there for what felt like a millennium, arms held above my head, a dagger held in my hands. Then I let them drop to my head. _I couldn't._ I let the dagger slip down along with my arms back to my sides. _I couldn't._ I sighed and opened my eyes, watching the Night Fury breathe. After all my years of pain, I had a chance to fix everything. _Yet I couldn't._

I was ready to walk away, but I turned back. There lay the majestic beast, unable to free itself. Left to die alone in the woods. This was not meant to be, not for any animal. Not even a dragon, one born to fly. I sighed. "I did this."

I could've just left it there and went on in my life, but something spurred me on to do something no Viking would've ever dared to do. I went back over to the Night Fury, dagger in hand, and I began to saw through the rope. Its eye snapped open with the sound of sawing, as though unsure how to react. It only took me a few seconds to free the dragon. The moment the last piece of rope was cut it was on me.

The first thing I felt was the ground leaving my feet. Then a sharp pain in my back as I was shoved and pinned against the boulder by the Night Fury's claws. They held a vice-like grip around my throat. Not too tight " I wasn't choking " but enough to keep me immobilized. Its piercing green eyes stared into mine with an intensity that could only be found in a true killer. The anger, the pain, the revenge, I could feel it all. And all I could do was shake and wait for my fate. Because I saw my untimely demise in those eyes, eyes that could only belong to a demon.

Its mouth opened and I shut my eyes knowing a fireball would shoot out and burn me alive. But it never came. Instead, the Night Fury roared a high-pitched shriek into my ear, so powerful it blew my bangs out of my eyes. I felt the pressure leave my neck. Opening my eyes, I watched as the beast flew away on its powerful wings, weaving in and out of the trees unsteadily.

I was gasping like a fish out of water, heart pounding a _rÃ'st _a breath. Never had I imagined I would see a Night Fury and live to tell the tale. Had any Viking done that? Ever?

I stood shakily, trying to regain my senses. Somehow I had evaded death. Gods help me. I began to walk back home, but didn't really make it that far. Within a moment the world began to spin and tilt, and the next thing I knew I blacked out.

* * *

><p>That came out really long, didn't it? Gods, I whipped through Hiccup's part like lightning, or better yet, a Night Fury! Then again, nothing aside from the movie's plot happened~

Now Jack Frost; that was a challenge! I really wanted to keep him in character (and write from his POV) while completely changing some parts of the plot. Hope it worked! As you could probably tell, the plot for RotG has already been altered quite drastically. Berk will get its fair share too, just not for another few chapters. Thanks for reading! I'll try to update again by the end of next week.

-Sushi

3. New Beginnings

Hey guys! You probably hate me for how late this came. It's been two weeks, I know. I am truly sorry. This would've been up sooner if it hadn't been that I was bedridden with the flu last week and haven't been up to doing more than moan and sleep and crave comfort food like fries and pita and chocolate chip cookies with coconut. Now I've recovered enough to start writing again, finally.

Plus, it was midterm week at my school so I was studying instead of writing! But I won't bore you with the details. The adventure continues!

* * *

><p>3 " New Beginnings

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><p>Part 1 " The Guardians

North Pole: Santoff Claussen (Jack's POV)

North was still beaming down at me when, without warning, a yeti came barreling in. The old man lost his jolly nature and swore loudly in his native tongue.

"How many times must I tell you to knock?"

The furry brown creature looked down sheepishly. Once he was forgiven, the yeti began warbling and flapping his arms wildly. I thought the sight was quite comical, but North's face became frowny.

"Forgive me, Jack," he said. "There is business I must attend to."

With that, he left.

I sat on his desk for all but two seconds until I smiled and ran over to the door. Peaked out left and right. No North. He was nowhere to be seen and there was a whole Santoff Claussen waiting to be explored. I considered staying like a good boy, but my smile just grew. Naw, when you hold the record on the Naughty List, you have to keep up that status!

Without another thought, I dashed.

The chaos of the place was just breathtaking. Everywhere I looked, there was something happening. Elves jingled around my ankles carrying things like cookies or paints to and fro, expertly not spilling anything despite the traffic. Yetis were doing anything from going over blueprints to checking stocks to painting toys to making them to cleaning. Yep, some of those furry beasts had on aprons and were vacuuming and dusting.

Blowing confetti out of my face, I glanced into a room through the window on the door. Several yetis were gathered around a conference table, sipping mugs of cocoa. The next room had even more yetis with glasses, hard hats, and glasses on. They were working large buzz saws, carving large hunks and planks of wood into workable pieces.

I went even deeper down the tower. It continued in a slanting spiral, red carpet plush under my feet. The next room had a heavy metal door. One glance in there told me why. Sparks flew as the yetis there wielded flamethrowers. Their faces and bodies were protected by very heavy aprons and masks as spare glints of heated metal shavings flew through the air. I backed away slowly and continued on. Several more floors passed by like this. On the very bottom were two open arches,

one to my right and one to my left. I went right first (I'm right-handed, so it's kinda an automatic direction to travel in, I think).

What I saw made me gasp.

There was another room, a basement, that looked even larger than all of Santoff Claussen combined. It was made up of more mismatched levels. Throughout were yetis working on larger than life ships. Great sails were stitched, hulls carved, decks sanded. Warbling instructions wove through the air. The noise was a crescendo here. There were also several portals around. Each was labeled a different city in the world. I found the one that said Central.

Amazing. Looks like North wasn't lying about being the leading toy maker and ship builder.

I was turned around by the security when I tried to go in more, so instead I went to the other room on the other side of the hall. The security here was a lot less strict, and for obvious reasons.

The kitchens. This was probably the only place completely free of yetis. Looks like fur didn't mix well with fiery ovens and melted candy gloop.

This was also the only place where the elves went unchecked. They worked, going from machine to oven to machine, perfectly-baked cookies and perfectly-shaped candies making their way into their respective boxes. It was quite impressive. Hundreds of different kinds of candy being wrapped and boxed, cookies filing out on plates constantly. No doubt a lot were fed to North and the yetis. Funny enough, for every three cookies at least one was consumed.

I sat on one of the tables and snagged cookies from passing plates. Being immortal doesn't require me to eat or sleep, but one can indulge on occasion. I also had a good time freezing them as well. The room was too warm so they defrosted almost immediately and went on with their lives, though some of the elves seemed really confused as to how they wound up on the floor.

Eventually, the room was way too warm for me too. Hey, I'm a spirit of winter. Me and heat don't exactly see eye-to-eye. Taking one last sugar cookie from a passing elf, I flew out. I decided on flying back to North's workshop (hopefully he wouldn't notice that I'd left). Summoning the wind I sailed up through the spiral at neck-breaking speeds. Tossed up *many* elves and yetis in the process; their angry shouts and jingles followed me all the way up. I just whooped and laughed. Oh, this was the life!

Turns out North wasn't back yet. Looks like that important business also meant time-consuming. It'd been at least twenty minutes. I waited again, but only managed about a minute or so before I got really bored. Hey, I'm used to traveling around the world creating joy and snowy adventures, not sitting cooped up in some little room with a window.

It wasn't extremely difficult to narrow down where the old Russki was. I'd gone down and hadn't seen a hint of him, so it only made sense to go up. Seeing as there were only three more floors, I walked and checked each room. More wonders, no North.

Before I knew it I was back in the globe room. North was there; so were the other Guardians. They stood with their backs to me, facing a skylight. From my vantage point I could make out the very bottom of the moon. Moonlight was streaming through the big hole in the ceiling.

I was going to greet them all, but something held me back. For a moment there, I swore I saw a figure in the light. Tall, taller than North's yetis, but slim. Robes that looked like something ancient from the country of Nihon hung off its shoulders in a way like drapes instead of close fitted. An aura of power encased this figure. Strangely enough, I couldn't make out any facial features.

Then the figure seemed to turn towards me. I gripped my staff tighter out of defensive habits. The Guardians all turned around. Tooth was the first to react. She fluttered over to me, then wrapped me in a very unexpected hug.

"Uhâ€¦h-hey?" I said uncertainly. Her warmth was somewhat uncomfortable. Then again, my cold was probably somewhat uncomfortable for her too, so I didn't say anything aside from my awkward greeting.

Tooth broke away with a smile splayed on her face. "North told us you've agreed to come!"

I looked up to where North was smiling. I smiled back. Then I noticed the strange figure in the moonlight had vanished without a trace. Could that have been MiM?

I nodded. "Yeah, but only to come, not to become a Guardian or anything."

"Good," Bunny muttered.

I shot him a look over Tooth's shoulder. His green eyes glared right back at me. North, oblivious to the tension, stepped forward and clasped me on the shoulders.

"Welcome to the party," he said.

"Thanks," I replied, and was surprised to find that I actually meant it. Then I noticed the lack of a certain silent person. "Wait, where'd Sandy go?"

"He has important Guardian duties that he can't take time off of," said Bunny. Then he added, "Unlike you, of course."

"Thanks for the memo," I muttered. "Soâ€¦what's the plan?"

North nodded. "Sandy will be back shortly. He has work to do. Meanwhile, we are to go to Central. From there, we take ship to wherever you lead us."

"Waitâ€¦me?"

"Trust me mate, I'm as surprised as you."

I ignored him. "Hold up. Why me?"

"I do not know, but Manny knows what he says. He told us that you have a place to go and that we must go with you and help you. You are going to lead us to Pitch."

"I don't even know where Pitch is!" I blurted out. "Why would I? He's never said much to me anyway"

Tooth said, "The Man in the Moon was certain that wherever you would go, Pitch would follow you. He said your next destination is his next target, and that your fates are going to cross paths."

"Great, more riddles," I huffed. Seeing they were serious though, I thought for a moment. "It depends how long it'll take us to get there by ship."

Bunny's ears perked up. "So you do have a place in mind, Frostbite?"

"Yeah. But it all depends on the length of our journey."

"What d'ya mean by that?"

"Well, in about two or three weeks, I should be going up to the far north to start guiding the winter storms south. I'm usually close to Berk by now to end their summer."

"Berk." North thought for a moment. "I have never heard of this place."

"Neither have I," Bunny added.

Tooth hesitated. "I have."

"Good!" exclaimed North. "You can tell us about it on way there!"

"I will say now that it's not the most Guardian-friendly place in the world."

"What's that supposed to mean?" I asked. She looked away, blond hair hiding her face, and didn't answer. I left it at that.

"Come everyone. To the sleigh!"

A sleigh? Really, wasn't there a more normal kind of transportation? I had to admit, I wasn't looking forward to it.

North began walking down the spiraling staircase to the red-carpet halls again. I followed, Tooth right behind me. Bunny came into the rear; was it me or did he seem uncomfortable about this situation? Probably was, 'cause he hates me and all.

I skidded back next to him. "So what's bothering you, Cottontail?"

"Never call me that again, Frostbite," he muttered back.

"Frostbite? I like it!"

Bunny sighed. "Well, if you must know, I'm not one for the sleigh. That bloody thing should be chopped up and used for firewood if you ask me."

Wow, okay, that was real hatred. How bad could that thing be?

I tried to lighten the mood. "So, are you always in a bad mood, or is it just one of those things you do around me?"

"Listen kiddo. I don't care what you're trying to play at, but I'm doing this all to get back at Pitch Black. He's ruined countless lives and I will not allow him to get away with it again. So you'd better know what you're doing, or you'll have a real fright trying to run from my wrath."

"Scary," I deadpanned.

Bunny was about to say something when North threw open double doors and noise encased us. We were in a tunnel made entirely of ice. Wooden beams supported the walls, pillars with lamps attached to them were the only source of light. Yetis and elves ran to and fro, shouting orders and jingling respectively. The whole place was chaos. Just walking through and a yeti threatened to chop off my head with a sword (why he had a sword in his hands, I have no clue).

"Boys, ship-shape! We must get going!" shouted North.

Now I was really uncomfortable with the situation. "There's no way I'm climbing into some rickety oldâ€|sleigh?"

The sleigh was like nothing I'd ever seen before. Several reindeer were pulling it along, all of them bucking and skittish. They were all taller than me, their breath steaming out of their noses as they huffed. North calmed them as I looked at the vehicle itself.

The thing was large enough to seat us all comfortably. Made of wood and metal, it was painted bright red and had four curving, shiny things on the bottom. What are they, rungs or something? Anyway, that thing was made to fly. It had folding wings, a turbo blaster, and a built-in globe for navigation.

I was impressed, to say the least.

It took me a few seconds to regain my composure, but afterwards I managed to say, "Okayâ€|one ride, but that's it."

"Everyone loves the sleigh," North said quietly, nudging Bunny with his shoulder.

Sandy was already there, sitting on the far right. I sat down next to him. "Wow, you're Guardian duties don't seem to take that long, do they?"

He just shrugged and smiled.

"Welcome back!" squealed Tooth.

"Bunny!" roared North. "What are you waiting for?"

I noticed that Bunny actually looked pretty worried for a change.

Nothing like the arrogant prick I knew from before. "I think my tunnels might be faster, mate. And, uh, safer."

"Bah, nonsense! Get in!" North grabbed him by the scuff of his neck and threw him down next to Tooth. "Buckle up!"

"Where are the bloody seatbelts?"

"Ah, it's just expression! Are we ready?" North asked a yeti while Bunny hyperventilated. The yeti panicked and started warbling something, but he was clearly ignored. North grabbed the reins and whipped them with force. "Out of the way!"

Yetis and elves scrambled to safety. Bunny made a weak sound, his nails digging into the seat and scratching the paint away. I laughed, but my attention was diverted as we began to descend into the tunnels.

If I had to bet what a roller coaster felt like, it would be this.

The only sounds were the pounding of hoofs, North's laugh, and Bunny's screams of terror. I was breathless, mouth opened in a wide smile, unable to sit down like the others. The sleigh slid from side to side, making loops and spins that I didn't think was physically possible.

"I hope you like the loop-de-loops!" shouted North to us.

"I hope you like carrots," Bunny replied. He did look a bit pale, come to think of it.

Sandy and Tooth were simply enjoying the ride. Tooth was laughing, her hair flying back and wings tucked down safely, and laughing as though there were no tomorrow. Sandy had his hands up and a smile as wide as mine on his face.

"Here we go!"

I jumped to the side of the sleigh as we cleared the tunnels and were outside. We were on the edge of a cliff, a wooden runway under us. The bottom looked a mile away. Then there was nothing but air under us. And we were flying, the sleigh rising as the reindeer pulled us along into the open sky. The sun was shining, no clouds to be seen, and the snow glittered beautifully on the surrounding mountains. That. Was. Amazing.

Only Bunny seemed to think the opposite, still gripping the seat like it was his only safety.

Oh, I was going to have so much fun teasing him about this!

* * *

><p>Part 2 â€" The Vikings

Berk: The Chief's House (Hiccup's POV)

It was dark and cold when I reentered the village. Night was falling. The stars above winked down at me as if they knew my secret. _Such a

cowardly boy, _they seemed to say. _So useless he couldn't even kill a bound, helpless Night Fury to save his own reputation._

"Shut up," I muttered darkly to the sky.

It didn't help that I was still conflicted about my actions. On one hand, I was beyond disappointed in myself. Seriously, what Viking would let an opportunity like that slip through his fingers? On the other hand, I had saved a creature of legends. I saw what no other Viking had ever lived to see: a living Night Fury. And I lived to tell the taleâ€|that is, if anyone believes me.

They wouldn't. I had no proof, and my track record with dragons hasn't been the best one. My shoulders slumped as I climbed the hill towards home. Now I would have to answer for what I did. I knew what I would tell my dad tonight. For the first time in my life I would agree with him. I wasn't meant to fight dragons.

I opened the door as quietly as I could. It'd been replaced while I was out, though the charred doorframe could use some repairs. Being new, the door was heavier than before and took more effort to open (definitely to keep the heat in for winter). That also meant it creaked open on the hinges obviously.

Closing the door also made a very obvious click. I looked over my shoulder. My dad was tending to the fire, his back turned towards me. The fact that he tensed meant he heard me. I snuck to the stairs and dashed up, feet pitter-pattering with each step. The wooden rungs were still too large for me to walk up normally, so I used my hands and feet for the extra boost.

"Hiccup."

"Dad." I flinched. We rarely spoke nowadays. This couldn't be a good sign. Still, that was my opportunity; it forced me to face him and say what I had to say. "I have to talk to you, Dad."

"I need to speak with you too, son." He walked over to the stairs while clasping his hands together.

We took deep breaths at the same time. I blurted out, "I think I don't want to fight dragons."

He said something at the same time; all I caught was "fight dragons."

"What?" we asked in unison.

"Uh, you go first," Dad said.

"No," I replied, "no, you go first."

"Alright." He exhaled loudly. "You get your wish. Dragon trainingâ€|you start in the morning."

Gods help me; this was not what I was hoping for. Please tell me this is some sort of sick joke. What I said next came out in a blur. "Oh man, I should've gone first, 'cause I was thinking, you know, we have a surplus of dragon-fighting Vikings, but do we have enoughâ€|bread making Vikings, or small home repair Vikings, or-"

"You'll need this," he grunted, tossing a **very** heavy axe into my arms (which I needed both arms to hold). Oh gods, he ***was*** serious!

Weakly, I said, "I don't want to fight dragons."

Stoick chuckled. Could he seriously not see I wasn't joking? "Come on, yes you do!"

I tottered down the stairs after him. "Rephrase. Dad, I can't kill dragons!"

"But you will kill dragons."

"No, I'm really very extra-sure that I won't." If there was one thing I learned from this afternoon, it was that.

The playfulness from my dad's voice vanished. He said in a very, well, stoic manner, "It's time, Hiccup."

"Can you not hear me?" I cried.

His face became the stony one he wore in front of the villagers. His voice was just as cold. No longer was this my dad, this was the leader of a ruthless Viking clan. "This is serious, son. You are almost an adult, and when you come of age you have to be able to defend yourself. Especially if you are to become the next chief of Berk."

He picked the axe out of my hands and shoved it into my left. I knew he was trying to understand that I was in fact left-handed, a rarity and inconvenience in our culture, but the fact that even I could tell from holding the weapon that it was balanced to be wielded with my other hand didn't help.

"When you carry this axe, you carry all of us with you. Which means you walk like us, you talk like us, you think like us." Stoick looked down on me after adjusting my sagging shoulders and wimpy arms. "No more of *that*!"

"You just gestured to all of me!" Like this hasn't happened before.

He ignored my annoyance. "Deal?"

"This conversation is feeling very one-sided," I remarked.

"Deal?"

I could feel the anger in his eyes burning me. My resisting his will wasn't helping. Though something was gnawing at my heart not to give in, I sighed and admitted defeat.

"Deal."

"Good." The Viking slipped away and my dad stood before me again. He shouldered his travelling pack and put on his treasured hat; that could only mean that there was another attempt to find the

Nest.

"You're leaving?" I asked.

"I am."

I hadn't been expecting that. "But winter's just around the corner. Even you were going on last night about needing to feed the village. And you know you're running the risk of the water freezing before you have a chance to get within a safe distance of the village!"

He sighed wearily. "I know, son, but we're Vikings. It's-"

"An occupational hazard," I finished for him. "Right?"

My dad half-smiled and seemed to hesitate as if unsure what to say. "Well, train hard. I'll be back within a fortnight. Probably."

"And I'll be here." I thought of the Night Fury again and my stomach seemed to fall away. "Maybe."

Berk: Dragon Training Arena

"Welcome to Dragon Training!"

The five young Vikings stood at the entrance of the rink as Gobber threw open the iron gates. Astrid took lead, squaring her shoulders and saying, "No turning back."

The rest followed her in, their expressions somewhat haughty. Slowly, the wonder that filled their eyes was undeniable. The rink was a large flat area carved out of the side of a mountain near the village that overlooked the sea, which was as grey as the overcast sky. The ground was solid rock, scarred over years of fighting and training. Walls of stone surrounded the young Vikings in a perfect circle. Chains crisscrossed over their heads to keep any stray flying dragons in. On the furthest side were several heavy metal doors held shut with wooden poles as wide as the trees they were originally made from; a few of them were shaking and banging as the dragons caged inside them sensed the new arrivals and were straining to get out.

Gobber smiled a little; he remembered his first day of dragon training very well. It took place on the very bedrock of the arena. Gods, how young he and Stoick had been!

Tuffnut was the first to break their awed silence. "I hope I get some serious burns!"

"I'm hoping for some mauling, like on my shoulder or lower back," cut in his twin sister Ruffnut, rolling her shoulders while saying it.

"Yeah," said Astrid with a no-nonsense tone. "It's only fun if you get a scar out of it."

"Yeah, no kidding, right?" Everyone turned around to see Hiccup the Useless. He was standing near the entrance, shoulders slumped and looking at the ground. He looked up for a brief moment to mutter sarcastically, "Pain. Love it."

Berk: Dragon Training Arena (Hiccup's POV)

The first thing I heard was Tuffnut. "Aw, great! Who let him in?"

What a great way to start the day â€" being killed by my fellow initiates. Gobber seemed to think so too, because he cut in before the comments escalated.

"Let's get started! The recruit who does best will win the honor of killing his first dragon in front of the entire village." He said this while using his prosthetic (a long hook today) to make a twisting motion in front of me. I knew exactly what it stood for. I breathed and ignored it, nerves already wracking.

"Hiccup already killed a Night Fury, soooooo does that disqualify him orâ€|?"

Wow, my own cousin. Not that I was surprised; Snotlout isn't exactly the kindest of peopleâ€|at least to me.

The others didn't help by laughing at his joke. They still thought I had been lying about the Night Fury. I did actually hit it, but killing it didn't go too well. Truth is I didn't tell anyone about it. Somehow, it felt like something that should be kept a secret.

As they walked away, Tuffnut asked, "Can I transfer to the class with the cool Vikings?"

Normally I would add a snide comment like 'what other Vikings?' but I kept my mouth shut today. Perhaps being undermined here wasn't what I wanted.

Gobber, sensing my darkening mood, put a hand on my shoulder and walked over to the others. He said some words to comfort me, but I must say if there's a Viking that sucks at making someone feel better about themselves, it's Gobber. "Don't worry. You're small and weak. That'll make you less of a target. They'll see you as sick or insane and go after the more Viking-like teens instead.

"Line up!" he barked to the class while pat/throwing me into their midst. I bumped into Fishlegs. He looked down on me â€" he being the tallest and widest out of everyone â€" but didn't say anything, at least. I saw Tuffnut shoot me a dirty look from his place on the other side of 'Legs.

"Behind these doors are just a few of the many species you will learn to fight!" Gobber began. Only Fishlegs looked truly excited as the introductions began. "The Deadly Nadder."

"Speed 8, armor 16."

I knew he was a bit of a geek when it came to dragon facts, but I didn't realize it was to this extent.

"The Hideous Zippleback," continued Gobber.

"Plus 11 stealth, times 2."

"The Monstrous Nightmare."

"Firepower 15."

"The Terrible Terror."

"Attack 8, venom 12!"

"Can you stop that?" Gobber shouted. He sighed before placing a hand on the nearest lever that would open the doors. "Andâ€¦the Gronckle."

"Jaw strength 8," Fishlegs whispered to me.

Snotlout's face went from scowl to scared. He stepped out of line. "Woah woah, wait! Aren't you gonna teach us first?"

"I believe in learning on the job." And with that the doors opened and the Gronckle shot out.

We all scattered to various corners of the arena. It was natural instinct: more places, more targets, less chance of being killed.

"Today," said Gobber, oblivious to our fear, "is about survival. If you get blastedâ€¦you're dead."

No way.

The Gronckle hit the wall. It saw a pile of good-sized rocks and swallowed them whole. I knew what it was doing. Gronckles, being boulder class dragons, would swallow stones which they heated inside their bodies and shot out. Cut through timber and blasted bone. Highly effective.

"Quick, what's the first thing you're going to need!" asked Gobber.

"A doctor?" I asked.

"Plus 5 speed?" Fishlegs added desperately.

Astrid, who I might add was the only one that didn't look panicked, replied, "A shield."

"Shields," the older man confirmed, "go!"

Of course this was the first time I noticed the sheer number of shields conveniently lying around the rink. I guess they really didn't want us dying. I found a red one nearby and tried to put it on. Looks like all the shields were made for right-handed people. Oh, the curse of being a lefty!

While I struggled to figure out how to hold my axe and put on my shield backwards, Gobber continued feeding us facts. "Your most important piece of equipment is your shield. If you must make a choice between a sword or a shield, take the shield!"

He hobbled over to me, shoved the shield on my arm, and shoved me into the middle. Meanwhile, the Gronckle chased a screaming Fishlegs

around the arena. Ruff and Tuff had their hands on the same shield â€" a green one with two skulls and flames painted on it â€" and were arguing over it.

"Get your hands off my shield!"

"There's, like, a million shields!"

"Take that one," Tuffnut said. "It has a flower on it. Girls like flowers."

In the moment it took him to gesture with his head, his grip loosened and Ruffnut yanked the shield out of his hands. She didn't even hesitate as she bashed him over the head with it. "Oops, now this one has blood on it."

He grabbed the shield again and they continued a round of tug-of-war. The Gronckle, seeing a very easy target, shot one blast at them. The shield exploded in a jolt of flames and the two spun and hit the ground.

"Tuffnut, Ruffnut, you're out," stated Gobber.

"What?" they asked, not really sure what hit them.

He ignored them and continued teaching. "Those shields are good for another thing. Noise. Make lots of it to throw off a dragon's aim."

The rest of us quickly began banging on our shields with our weapons. The effect was pretty effective. The Gronckle seemed tired, dizzy, and/or confused. It shook its head without much avail.

"All dragons have a limited number of shots. How many does a Gronckle have?"

Now that we seized banging on our shields, I almost immediately ran to the side where a very cozy looking empty equipment rack was leaned against the wall like a makeshift shelter. Someone else could answer Gobber's question for me.

"Five?" asked Snotlout.

"No, six!" Fishlegs corrected.

"Correct, six! That's one for each of you!" As he acknowledged the praise, the Gronckle shot the shield out of his hand. "Fishlegs, out!"

Fishlegs threw his hands into the air, weapon abandoned, and ran away screaming. With the second weakest person blasted, Gobber turned his attention back to me. "Hiccup, get in there!"

I peeked out of my hiding place long enough to almost get killed by a fireball. I jumped and flitted back to where I was. There was no way I would ever get used to this dangerous place. Snotlout, on the other hand, was so comfortable he was flirting with Astrid nearby. She seemed more focused on the dragon, though.

"So, uh, anyway, I moved into my parents' basement. You should come

by sometime and work out." "You look like to work out!" His shield was gone within a breath.

"Snotlout! You're done!"

"So I guess it's just you and me, huh?" I asked Astrid, finally finding the courage to wander out to the middle.

"Nope, just you."

"Wha-?"

I barely had enough time to shield my face before a flaming rock knocked my shield straight off my arm. It began rolling away and I ran after it. _Get the shield, get the shield, get the shield, _a mantra went in my head as I chased after my wood lifeline.

"One shot left," Gobber said as I ran, arms outstretched. My fingers managed to graze the wood once or twice, but it tumbled slightly to the right and away from me. Unable to turn around I kept going straight until I stumbled and my back was against a wall. There was no escape.

"Hiccup!" I heard a shout, but I couldn't think.

The Gronckle sniffed me a few times. I could feel its fiery breath ruffling my hair. I froze. The dragon, now done sniffing, decided I was an enemy. Its mouth opened. I almost expected it to roar like the Night Fury, but instead fire formed in the back of its throat. I saw my life flashing before my eyes. I held my breath. This was it; I was going to die.

I curled up, arms around my head while looking away, awaiting my fate.

A lifetime seemed to pass until I felt the heat above me. Wait, above? Gasping, I opened my eyes to see Gobber's hook in the dragon's mouth. He had turned it ever so slightly so it blasted the wall above me.

"And that's six," he grunted while swinging the Gronckle in circles. "Go back to bed, you overgrown sausage!"

He flung the dragon quite forcefully into the cage and slammed the door shut. By then, the others had regrouped and gathered in the inner rink near where I was still in the fetal position.

"You'll get another chance, don't you worry." I wasn't sure if he was speaking to the Gronckle or us. As everyone caught their breaths and their wits, Gobber added, "And remember thisâ€¦"

"A dragon will always, _always_, " he emphasized, "go for the kill."

I curled up there for another moment until my legs had dejellified. Then I stood and placed a hand on the charred stone. Death had been so close. But as I was catching his breath, a thought struck me. A thought that caused me to forget my near-death experience for the day and ponder over something from the day before. A dragon always went for the killâ€¦

Raven's Point: Hiccup's POV

"¿so why didn't you?"

The pieces of sawed rope and stones were where I'd left them the day before. They sat there doing absolutely nothing, but made me ask this question to no end. Gobber said it; they always go for the kill. Even the Gronckle in the rink tried at it today. But the Night Fury didn't. It pinned me down, had me disarmed and unable to escape and easy to finish off, yet all it did was roar in my ear and fly away.

Why?

I let the bola drop out of my hand and stood from my crouch. The forest was silent today. Thankfully, the earlier cloud cover had broken, making the air warm and sunny. There were even birds still singing, so that meant more days like this ahead. At least that meant Dad and the others wouldn't be stranded by ice sheets this week.

Letting myself get lost in thought, I was about to walk away when I swore I heard the sound of wings in the distance. In the same direction the Night Fury went the day before. I didn't stop to think; thinking was becoming somewhat underrated in Viking culture anyway. I acted on impulse, walking carefully to where the noise came from. If there was one thing I could do, it was walk silently without being noticed by anyone who could and would not hesitate to nag, bully, and/or annoy me.

After a few moments I came across a cove. I knew this place existed, but rarely visited it. It was about forty _faÃ°mr_ wide and ten or fifteen long. It was well secluded, the only entrance being a small opening I was able to duck and walk through; a full-grown Viking would have issues getting into such tiny spaces.

Sunlight streamed through the surrounding pines in splaying rays of gold and warmth. There was enough to have grass straggle through the unblemished soil a far, fatal fall below. Rocks and boulders scattered in random heaps covered in spongy moss. In the middle was a large lake that even from the distance I could see was full of fish that lazily splashed on occasion. Birds fluttered to and fro from the few tree branches there were, chirps and twitters filling the air. The sound of wings I thought I'd heard, though, had completely vanished.

"Well this was stupid," I muttered. Why would there be a Night Fury in a cove anyway? It was probably back at the Nest by now.

I was ready to give up and leave, but something shiny caught my attention. I knelt down and saw several glinting scales reflecting in the late afternoon light. I picked one up. It just barely fit in my palm, circular, and black as charcoal. I'd never seen these scales before. What in Odin's name¿?

A sudden black shape flashed before me. I cried out, dropped the scale, and backed away into the shadows by the rock wall of the tunnel. A dragon fell in front of me. The Night Fury! I was sure it was the same one! It flapped its wings furiously, trying to climb the

sheer rock with its claws until it lost its grip and went down with a cry.

I crawled out a little, cautious. It didn't notice me; rather, it had its back turned to me and was shooting a purple flame at the ground in frustration. The part of me that wanted to learn saw a chance. I fumbled for my journal. Finding it in my inner pocket, I whipped it out and opened to the next blank pages. I began to draw a rough outline of the dragon " its pointed head and sleek wings, the tail and the fins.

"Why don't you just," I whispered to myself, "fly away?"

Then I noticed it didn't have a left tailfin. Strange. I smudged it out of my rough sketch.

The Night Fury tried to flap again. It got into the air, but fell before reaching a great distance. It slammed into the ground with tremendous force by the water's edge. A few shocked fish splashed out of the shallows. The Night Fury turned its head to watch them for a moment. Then it pounced, head snapping at the elusive fish in the water.

I sighed a bit while I watched it. I didn't know what was wrong, but it wasn't normal for a dragon to be downed, unable to fly. This thing looked miserable and in the moment, weak. I relaxed a bit. Then I dropped my pen.

It fell down the rock with a noticeable clatter. The Night Fury tensed at the sound, and looked up. Its eyes met mine. I gasped, expecting it to attack. But it didn't; it only continued to watch me with an unusual sort of expression. What it was I couldn't tell, but it didn't seem like a monstrous killing legend in that moment. It looked like any other living creature.

And for a second I wasn't scared anymore. Instead, I was fascinated.

* * *

><p>And there we go! Another ridiculously long chapter. Question: should I split the chapters to a two-part thing. So I'd post the Guardians then the Vikings as separate chapters? You're choice. I really don't care; I tend to work out of order anyway, so updating might be a bit more sporadic, yet frequent.

_Reviews are always welcomed and loved! To everyone who reviewed before, I hope this story is living up to expectations. Thank you for the support! I'm always open to PMs too, so come by and write me whenever. _

Okay, I've got another chapter to get onto! Later peeps!

_Sushi _

4. Taking Sides

Hey guys! Thank you for your patience!

I got sick. Again. Which, I will say, is extremely rare for me; I'm never sick for more than a couple of days a year. Stupid flu season. Then I've had a lot of homework " I mean a LOT of it! And last week I had three back-to-back-to-back swim meets. And sectionals are coming up (where I have to swim my first IM). And there's been a lot of other stuff going on too.

_That's about it for delay excuses. To apologize, I wrote an extra-long chapter which took several hours of working for the last two weeks to complete. Go on, it's waiting" | _

* * *

><p>4 " Taking Sides

* * *

><p>Part 1 " The Guardians

Somewhere Over the Ocean: The Sleigh

"Can't we take the bloody portal?" Bunny asked for about the fiftieth time.

"Nonsense!" bellowed North. "Reindeer need exercise. They haven't flown for long time. Losing touch. Hya!"

He cracked the reins with a mighty shout. Bunnymund turned green as a sudden burst of speed shot him back into his seat with great force. He dared to peek over the side of the sleigh, and immediately regretted his decision. They were gliding right above the clouds, wispy white things that floated along like overstretched cotton balls. Far below was the open sea. An unyielding sheet of navy blue, choppy and cold. From their height the water's waves were as small as the whites on Bunny's pinkie fingernail. The very sight of it all caused the Pooka to retch emptily overboard.

Sandy floated over and patted him comfortingly on his back. It was the seventh time Bunny's stomach had decided to act up for the hour they'd been in the air. When he was finished, he hopped over to North.

"How much longer are we going to be up here?"

"Twenty minutes. Why?"

"Twenty! I'm dying here, mate! If I don't see land in the next five, I will literally throw myself overboard and let the sharks take care of me!"

"Technically, the Atlantis Ocean is too cold for sharks, so" | " said Jack (which really wasn't helping his short temper). The Pooka glared at the winter spirit coldly.

"Listen here, Frost. Unlike the rest of you sitting back here, I can't fly. So I would really appreciate having some good solid land under my paws again. Got it?"

"Sure sure, whatever you say Kangaroo."

Bunny scowled, but didn't have the energy to argue. Puking up your guts seven times did that to a guy. Meanwhile, North decided to listen to what Bunnymund had foolishly said earlier.

"Five minutes? I can do that!"

The poor Pooka's ears fell, plastered flat onto his head. "Oh please don't!"

Too late. The older man made the reindeer go at their top speed, sprinting through the sky as if there were no tomorrow. Tooth and Sandy immediately went to comfort Bunny, who collapsed onto the wooden bottom as his legs gave under him.

"This is it," he mumbled weakly. "I'm dead."

"You'll be fine!" exclaimed Tooth comfortingly. "You'll see. We'll be on land in no time!"

Even Jack Frost had a few words to say. "Chill out, Kangaroo. It's not like you'll fly off and die or something."

"Just shut up. I could care less about you right now."

Suddenly, a gust of unexpected wind blew with tremendous force. Jack let out a cry and flew over the back of the seats. Bunny jumped up and searched desperately. "Frostbite!"

His worry turned to a scowl as he saw Jack lying safely on his back on the sleigh's runners, staff balanced on his chest and arms tucked behind his head. His legs were crossed and he wore an easy smile. His eyes glinted mischievously. "Aw, so you do care!"

Bunny looked like he was ready to murder the boy right then and there when North shouted, "Land ho!"

"Thank the moon!"

Jack wasn't exactly sure why Bunny was so relieved, considering that Central didn't seem much like 'good solid land'. Still, it was probably better than having no land, so Jack didn't argue with that.

It was one of several landmasses towards the south that had broken away from a continent. These islands were no longer part of the normal land; through the use of magic, they now floated about a mile up above all other places in the world. Only one was known to be close enough to land to have road built up to it; the capital of the world, Central.

Central was by far the largest of these places â€" nearly twenty miles in length. Being so large, it didn't float well, so the sloping bottom of the island grazed the ocean enough to have ports and trading docks built there. On the other side, which was a plateau that jagged out from the rest of the island, was the Sky. It was one of only seven in the world that had ports for the very rare (and highly expensive, not to mention well-regarded) skyships that sailed the skies, hence the name.

North was guiding the sleigh towards the Sky. "We park reindeer

there. Good runway. They need rest."

"Hypocrite much?" muttered Bunny darkly. "I though he said they needed exercise a minute ago."

"We take ship to Berk from here," continued the Russki, disregarding the Pooka's comment. With that, the party descended from the open skies to the landing area.

Central: The Sky (Jack's POV)

For the first time in a long time, it seemed as though Bunny didn't care that I was laughing my ass off at him. He looked so silly; lying in the grass with that look of content on his face as if there were no tomorrow. When he did come to his senses, he scowled.

"Shut it, boy. You'd feel the same way too if you were a Pooka."

"You mean all Pooka's are little wussies?" I asked.

Bunny stood up, all 6'1" of him. "Listen Frostbite. You have gone too far this time."

"No time to dawdle!" barked North. "We must go quickly!"

I ducked under Bunny's quick swipe and ran after the older man. Tooth had flitted off elsewhere, a few of her little workers showing up the moment we did to tell her some important news. Behind me came Sandy, walking calmly through the chaotic dock.

North set a brisk pace, parting through the crowd without a problem. I, on the other hand, walked through them. It helped to be invisible sometimes. Still, being invisible didn't make me any faster. I still felt the subconscious need to shoulder through the unyielding crowd.

I finally caught up to North and asked, "So you were saying something about sailing to Berk, right?"

The man seemed a bit bewildered about my question. "Sail? It take six weeks to sail so far. You need to be there in half of time. No, we will fly!"

He swung his arm to the ship, and my breath literally left me.

I didn't realize we were on a loading deck until I followed his arm. Before us was a skyship. Notably the largest skyship I'd ever seen. The thing could easily fit tons of people; it looked as though the body was at least three floors, with hundreds of windows. I could practically imagine the hallways inside. The deck was as long as the runway we'd just been on. Giant red sails were drawn from the masts. The very front â€" the bow, I think â€" was the carving of an angel, wings and arms spread to the horizon.

"A beauty, is she not?" North asked proudly. "My personal ship. I call her _Ð;ÐµÐ²ÐµÑ€Ð½Ð¼Ðµ__Ñ•Ð,Ñ•Ð½Ð,Ðµ_. But that is_ Aurora Borealis _in Common Tongue."

"The Northern Lights," I whispered, awed. As cool as it all was, it

seemed stupidly pointless. "I don't get it. Why bother with the ship? I mean, I could fly to Berk in a couple of hours. Won't it take more time to come down to Central and go back up there?"

"Yes, it will, but it was Man in Moon's orders. We are to stay on ship from here."

"Okay thenâ€|"

Bunny snorted, waving a boomerang at me threateningly. "Trust me Frostbite, I didn't agree to this either."

"You're scarier on land, ya know that?" He tsked and turned away.

We made our way to the loading area, where several yetis were giving commands. They snapped to attention when North approached and formed a very militaristic line. "This is crew for journey: Phil, Andy, Robb, Gerald, Maddie, and Henrietta."

"Phil's coming?" I asked. I was sincerely trying not to laugh at the fact that there was a yeti named Henrietta.

"Yes." North looked at him thoughtfully. "He keep Andy in line, make sure he paint things correct color. He tried to paint ship darker brown other day. Ha! Phil stopped him in time."

Honestly, I thought it didn't matter if the ship had ended up a shade darker or not, 'cause it would've looked fine either way, but I kept that thought to myself. Poor Andy; he must've gotten the short end of the stick. I decided to look around. From my standpoint, I could make out the portal that probably led to Santoff Claussen; yetis and super-confused elves were delivering materials and meandering uselessly (respectively). I was getting really tempted to fly through, freeze a few elves, and fly back.

Suddenly, Tooth reappeared, panicked. "Oh no, this is terrible!"

"What is matter?" asked North.

"A few of my babies came and told me Pitch Black came! He's been spotted with several monsters of some sort â€" I couldn't make it out, the girls were so afraid â€" and he's attacking the Tooth Palace!"

Bunny was the first to react. "Go," he said. "Find out what he's plotting this time."

Tooth looked at the rest of us for confirmation, which we gave. She smiled. "Thanks guys."

And with that, she winged away.

"We should go after her." I don't know where those words came from, but I said them. The others stared at me. "What? She's could be in danger! We can't let her go out there alone."

Sandy nodded seriously. North gave me a strange look but seemed to agree. Even the silly rabbit considered what I was saying. Then he did something I seriously didn't think he was capable

of.

"Frostbite's right. We should get to the sleigh." Bunny hopped over to where the vehicle was. "We going or what?"

North laughed. "You finally warmed up to the sleigh, eh Bunny?"

"I did no such thing. But we've got a fellow Guardian's existence on the line here, so I'll do my best to cope with your ridiculous taste of transportation, mate."

We all clambered in. North cracked the reigns furiously and we shot off faster than before.

I turned to Bunny and Sandy. "What did you mean by her existence is on the line?"

The Sandman looked eager to explain, but I stopped him. "Sorry Sandy, but we've already tried charades earlier. It didn't go to well, remember?"

He seemed really dejected, but didn't argue. Bunny answered my question in his place. "As you're aware, Guardians are selected by the Man in the Moon to become part of his personal guard."

"The Moonlight Guard, right?"

"Precisely. Now, to become an official Guardian, you need to swear to the oath. The one which you refused to do earlier today." I nodded. He continued, "Once the oath is taken, we are forever bound to MiM and any services he may require. Usually fighting off Pitch Black.

"The thing with Guardians is that each of us has a center."

"North told me about that," I cut in.

"Good. Saves me the explanation. Anyway, this center is something that every child has in them somewhere. Our primary job is to protect the children's faith in these beliefs: Dreams, Memories, Wonder, and Hope. It used to be that if children didn't believe in us, our powers were gone. Thankfully, MiM was able to make it so that we're immortal. As long as there are children who believe in these ideas, there is magic."

"Hold up!" I tried my best to get everything straight. "So, you four are the reason there's magic in the world."

"It's a bit more complicated than that mate, but in a nutshellâ€¦yeah."

My mind was a bit blown, I'll admit. I think the other passengers noticed, because Sandy gave me a pat on the back and Bunny watched me in a creepy, calculating sort of way.

"Stay with me kiddo, I'll finish explaining. For whatever reason, the only thing strong enough to misguide a child's faith is fear. Once they are afraid, it takes a combined effort to restore them to their childhood innocence. That's where we come in.

"The whole point of us protecting children is to help influence them to be better adults in the future, as well as ensure that children are happy and well. This is why we need to stop Pitch at all costs. He plans to shatter the faith in children. Then our powers, as well as all the magic in the world, will dwindle and fade. He plans to rise up from the chaos as the next powerful figure."

"So if he wins, then everything we know is gone? What about the Man in the Moon? Surely he'll have enough power to stop Pitch?"

Bunnymund hesitated. "Not during a new moon he won't. His powers wax and wane like the moon itself. The only reason it's always full is because of the magic. Once that's gone — once the Guardians are gone — all Pitch has to do is sit tight until the next new moon and the power is his." He watched me as I tried not to get overwhelmed by the info. "Any questions?"

I nodded. "So what's this whole rumor about being seen if you're a Guardian?"

"It's true. Once you take oath, you will be seen by everyone who cares to notice. On the flip side, if you don't have any believers your powers will be greatly affected. Anything else buggin' ya?"

"Um — yeah. Why do kids know you exist, but the adults don't seem to care?"

"Over the years, we've shown ourselves on occasion to keep the belief going. Not too often, or kids'll be looking constantly for us. But once they grow up, they don't feel the need to believe in us. They, by then, are completely capable of living without the need of 'superstitions' or the likes. All they need are their own minds because their faith in our centers will have strengthened."

I was going to ask more, but North shouted, "We're coming to Portal! Hold on!"

I ran forward to where North stood. Sure enough, there was a swirling blue circle opening up in the sky. The reindeer's hoofs pounded silently, their breathes puffing and snorting, as they were forced into a full-blown sprint.

Air rushed around us like a deadly turbulence as the sleigh shot through the portal. In an instant, we were somewhere I'd never been before.

Tooth Palace (Jack's POV)

Tooth Palace was a magnificent structure. Painted various hues of pink and purple and gold, it floated in a permanent sunset (at least, that's what I've heard). It was literally thousands of random, diamond-shaped spires that decorated the sky. Something, though, was very off with the happy scene.

The first thing I saw was panic. Tooth's ladies were flying to and fro, squeaking to each other as they were chased by dragons. I heard Tooth's voice as she shouted orders to them. That all I could make out. Pure chaos. One fairy was about to be swallowed by a flaming red

dragon. I grabbed her before her untimely demise.

"Shh, don't worry," I whispered soothingly. "It's gonna be okay."

North guided the reindeer out of the center of the fight and above it. I stood on the back of the sleigh and looked down. Flames shot in all directions as dragons attacked the fairies, their jaws snapping and wings flapping. I'd never seen a dragon in my life; it was quite terrifying. I'm not exactly compatible with flames, after all.

I looked at the Guardians. They were all ready for battle. North had his dual curving blades out, Bunny his boomerang, and Sandy crafted two golden whips from sand. I gripped my staff and jumped off with a shout, knowing the wind would save me.

We didn't have to fight for long. The dragons were gone in a minute, leaving Tooth's palace accessible. We found her there, flying the golden, sunlit halls in a fever. North landed the sleigh and we rushed over to her.

"Oh no, oh no, oh no! They're gone. They're all gone!"

"What's gone?" asked Bunny.

"The teeth!" she cried hoarsely. "All the teeth of the children of Berk. They were taken while I was out on the battle front! How did he know? Why would he take them?"

"Who?" I asked.

"Me."

We all turned around as the cold voice greeted us. A figure rose from the shadows. He was tall and clothed in long black robes. His sharp white teeth flashed as he grinned, amber eyes sparkling maliciously.

"Guardians," he said with a mock bow. "Oh! And Jack Frost. What a lovely party we've got here."

"Quit fooling around, mate," growled Bunnymund, a boomerang out and ready.

Pitch smiled and folded his grey fingers together. "Bunny. I can taste the hatred coming off of you. It's really quite enticing. Tell me, how are the other Pookas. There aren't too many of them left now, are there?"

Bunny threw the weapon with all his might. It hit nothing.

"You really should learn to control your temper," Pitch said from behind him. "Or you won't know what hits you when it does."

The Auslandian turned around, but was greeted by thin air. The next thing I knew, Pitch was staring into my face a mere few inches from me. "Jack Frost. It's been a long time. Tell me, why are you wasting your time with these so-called Guardians? Are they really that impressive, with all their tricks and shiny toys?"

"What are you getting at?" I muttered

"Nothing really," he sighed. "It was just a question. But tell me Jack, why are you doing this? Do you really plan on becoming a Guardian? There's nothing great about it, I'm sure. After all, take away a child's belief and they are weaker than humans."

I made a swipe for him, but he vanished and walked on the underside of one of the rose-colored pillars. "Now now, Jack. I was only trying to be friendly."

I smirked. "And why would you do that?"

"Simple. You're the only one who understands how I feel. To not be believed in. To not be seen."

I gasped. He didn't need to say that. I didn't want to think about it.

"Quit playing coward and fight like a man!" roared Bunny. "I could take you and whatever you have to offer single-handedly."

Pitch rematerialized in front of our group. "Well, I am in no mood for meaningless fighting. No, we will meet again. Then we'll see who is really stronger â€" the Guardians, or fear. Take this as a warning."

He turned his back and vanished.

With the immediate threat gone, the others had turned to comfort Tooth. She was crying, legs curled on the ground. "Oh, this is awful. Now how can we continue to Berk? We've lost the source of magic."

"It is okay. We will find way," said North.

I watched for a few moments, then flew away awkwardly. I wasn't close to any of these people; at least, not the kind of close that they were to one another. I didn't know what to do.

A small hand patted me on the shoulder. I looked up to see one of the fairies, the one I had saved, watching me with her curious eyes. I stroked her head gently. "Hey there little fairy. You're like a mini Tooth. Can I call you â€|Baby Tooth?"

She seemed okay with the name, after consideration. Nodding, she perched on my shoulder. Then Tooth came.

"I was wondering where you'd gone."

"I'm not the most comforting of people," I murmured. Tooth smiled.

"Let me show you somethingâ€|"

She took my hand, warm and thrumming with life compared to my stiff icy one, and tugged me along. She led me down to the bottom of her floating palace to a cave. It was large and full of boulders, ivy snaking its way across every surface. There was a waterfall too. It froze as I walked over it.

There was only one part of the area that wasn't covered in ivy. On that spot was a painting. Old, a bit faded too, but definitely something I recognized. It was a picture of Tooth flying before a group of children, who were reaching out to her and smiling. The real Tooth knelt in front of it.

"This," she said, gesturing to the painting, "is my purpose."

"Collecting teeth?"

"Yes."

"Umâ€¦why?"

She laughed. "I'm sorry, I forgot you didn't know. All baby teeth contain memories. More specifically, a child's most precious memories. My job is to collect these teeth, so if and when there is a time a child needs them, we can access them. That's my center. I'm the Guardian of Memories."

"Really?" It sounded a bit farfetched to me.

"Really. I have, wellâ€¦had, every child's teeth. Even yours."

"Mine? You mean you have my memories?"

"Had." My hopes shattered instantly. "They were stolen years ago by Pitch. I don't know why he took yours other than to get back at the Man in the Moon."

"Why?"

"Because he created you." Tooth saw my confusion. "Pitch has wanted power for all of his existence. He's tried and failed several times to control the world with fear. That was why the Guardians were created in the first place, to take away his power. Each potential Guardian is made from the will of the Man in the Moon. We're all resurrected to who we are today."

"Resurrectedâ€¦" I trailed off before gasping. "Are you saying he brought all of us back from the dead?"

"Yes. I still remember when I was. I might tell you some time. Right now, we've got more important things to do. We have to get to Berk. If Pitch stole the teeth of all the children there, then there's got to be a reason behind it." She stood up. "We should get going."

"Rightâ€¦"

"Is something wrong, Jack?"

She was watching me with her big, violet eyes. I shrugged off her question; I didn't want to tell her how affected I was from the fact that I could regain my memories. "Nothing. It's nothing. Let's get back to the ship."

Somewhere Over the Ocean: The Ship (Jack's POV)

We were in the air for at least an hour by then. I'd already explored the Crow's Nest, the bedrooms, Captain's Quarters, the kitchen, and the weapons' storage. I've gotta admit, that collection of blades and guns was quite impressive. Too bad I'd never use them (thanks to the fact Bunny doesn't trust me).

Okay, not really _that_ bad. I mean, I have a staff! What more would I need?

I went back on the main deck. It was shiny as though it'd been just swabbed. My feet left icy prints behind, confirming that water was there and washed away the grime. I didn't really care. I just took my time to walk up to the bow. When I got there, I looked out to the view unveiling before my eyes.

All I could say was, "Wowâ€¦"

The sky billowed out around the ship, engulfing us in clouds and air and freedom. The grey-to-white clouds, soft and puffy, created a thick blanket that separated the ship from world below. The wind called to me, but I chose not to answer it. I guided it to the sails instead, hearing them snap out taunt and continue our endless gliding.

Everywhere I looked, there was light. Stars seemed to sparkle like the purest snow from every angle of the inky sky. Glittering, reflecting on my eyes in an endless river of diamonds. And there was the moon. Full and larger than I'd ever seen it before. It seemed to swallow up half of the horizon with its glory. Rays of moonlight danced across the wooden deck of the ship as if they were trying to retrace my footsteps, shooting over the clouds to create shadows of light and dark, yet somehow never overwhelming the glow of the stars.

Something about this surreal landscape was more than I could take.

I turned away, feeling cold (abnormally so for my standards) for the first time in decades. Why had I never been able to see this beauty before? I'd flown the skies for three hundred years, and this was the first time I'd ever noticed the moon and the stars and the clouds like that. How could I have been so blind?

I was about to hop down and go back to bed when Toothiana fluttered out. She came over to me. "Do you mind if I sit here."

Instead of replying, I gestured with my staff to the opposite side of the bow. She smiled to me a smile that said 'thank you' and sat down to the angel's left. We stayed like that for a moment, bodies facing each other but eyes looking out to the horizon. Finally, Tooth broke the silence.

"Jack, about todayâ€¦with your teeth...I don't know what to say, but I'm so-"

"Don't apologize. It's not your fault." She looked up and it was my turn to smile. "It happened years ago anyway. Just another reason for us to find Pitch and stop him from whatever he's planning to do, right?"

"I guess," Tooth replied with a small shrug.

We sat for a moment more in companionable silence. Finally, I decided to ask a question that'd been bugging me.

"Tooth?"

"Yes Jack?"

"What other duties do you have?" She seemed a bit confused, so I continued. "I mean, aside from being the Guardian of Memories. North designs toys and builds ships, Sandy brings children dreams, Bunny is something I could care less about, so what do you do aside from being a Guardian?"

"I'm the spy."

"Say what?" I hadn't been expecting that. Maybe a teacher or something, but a spy?

She laughed at my expression. "It's true. With all the other fairies I can cover just about any area of the world when it comes to hidden spies. They act as my eyes and ears, really. I'm just the 'mastermind.'" Tooth said this while making little quotation marks with her fingers. "There are even a few mice around Eurasia that help in that division. And a lovely bunch of young marsupials in Auslandia!"

I sat there, digesting the information. "So when do you come into play?"

"I sort through all of it. Filing, compiling, delivering to the Man in the Moon; it's everything I do." Toothiana looked out over the sea of clouds and sighed a bit. "I do miss it thoughâ€|"

"Miss what?"

She threw her arms out to the horizon. "All of this! Seeing the world. I remember the sleeping faces of every child I'd ever taken a tooth from, including yours. That's what kept me going half the time. All of them so peaceful, lying there in the night. It was part of my purpose."

"You mean you haven't been out in the field for years?" I asked. She nodded slowly. "But you're the Tooth Fairy! Does that mean you aren't the one collecting the teeth anymore?"

Tooth shrugged.

"How long since you've been out?"

"Oh, you know, about four hundred and fifty-six years," she replied, a hint of pride and sadness in the answer.

"So being a Guardian is that busy?"

"It can be, but then again I'm the one who sorts through all the information. It's a bit hectic, but I feel better with all the work to do. It keeps me busy the way I like it. Don't think it as a

put-off from becoming a Guardian though, Jack. I'm probably the busiest out of anyone, except maybe Sandy. He's got a whole world of kids relying on his dreams for a good night's rest."

I thought about it for a while. Tooth smiled. "I'm sure the others can explain their own stories and purposes better than I can."

"Even Sandy?"

"Especially Sandy. Sure, he can't talk, but he can share a dream with you. It's really something!" She fluttered up. "Well, goodnight Jack."

"Yeah," I replied. "Goodnight."

Tooth smiled one last time and went inside. I was getting a bit tired, despite not needing to sleep, but I chose to stay out. Letting the cool air tousle my hair around, I looked out over the horizon at the moonlit sky again, retracing all that I'd learned that day.

I had a lot of going-over to do.

* * *

><p>Part 2 â€" The Vikings

Berk: The Main Hall (Hiccup's POV)

The weather didn't hold up for long. I got back late for the second day in a row. It was raining thick sheets of icy wetness that soaked through my thin clothes and plastered my hair to my head. Trying not to shiver, I pushed open the heavy doors to the Main Hall and entered.

The doors themselves were art; I'd spent many days alone admiring the intricacy of the carvings. There were swirls and intertwining knots, both carved and wrought of metal. They were painted various shades of golds and browns. Probably paint brought by traders years ago. Now, though, I didn't have the time to regard them. Working as an apprentice did that to my free time.

The Main Hall was the largest building, as well as the oldest, in Berk. The only one to have survived multiple dragon attacks over the years, it's located by the mountain where the town rests on, practically built into it. The ceilings were high, taller than the tallest buildings, taller than ten men standing on each other's shoulders.

The stone floor was smoothed down into steps and flat eating/meeting areas from generations of feet walking over it. The walls, also stone, were covered in tapestries and paintings of Viking leaders past; I remember being younger and forced to recite the names of these leaders to my father. Several statues of the gods adorned the empty floor, another thing I remember being forced to look at for many winter afternoons.

Towering pillars of ancient trees supported ceiling beams that disappeared from sight. All that could be made out were candle holders built into them that were lit every day by some of the volunteers who usually stayed in Berk all year.

The few Vikings who weren't on the raid â€" mostly the elderly, the craftsmen, and a few dunderheads â€" were seated, eating. They ignored me; I did likewise. In the tables and benches nearest the doors were the other teens, Gobber amongst them and teaching away.

"All right, where did Astrid go wrong in the ring today?" I heard him ask as I came in.

She answered smoothly, "I mistimed my somersault dive. It was sloppy. Threw off my reverse tumble."

"Yeah," Ruffnut sighed boredly, "we noticed."

"No, no, you were great!" And there was Snotlout trying to woo Astrid again. Couldn't he see she wasn't interested? I gave up before I even started. "What was soâ€| 'Astrid.'"

"She's right," said Gobber. "You have to be tough on yourselves. Where did Hiccup go wrong?"

And now they knew I was here. I walked over and picked up my dinner plate â€" one extra-large chicken leg as always. Though there was plenty of room on the bench they were sitting at, Snotlout shuffled over so I couldn't sit with them. All eyes were on me now. He sneered.

I rolled my eyes. Rather than challenging my cousin, I walked away to the empty table nearby; I would still be able to hear Gobber and not have to deal with their hatred tonight.

"Uh, he showed up?" suggested Ruffnut as Snotlout continued to glare at me.

"He didn't get eaten," added Tuffnut.

I grabbed a flask of weak mead from Snot's other side; he slid over as if I wanted to sit between him and Fishlegs (which I didn't).

"He's never where he should be."

Astrid's condescending tone took the cake, even though she refused to look at me until she said it. I could feel her eyes boring into my skull as I took a seat away from them.

"Thank you, Astrid." Gobber, to my benefit, cuffed the twins across the head with his hand as he passed them. "You need to live and breathe this stuff. Not just hang around the sidelines. If you want to be able to fight dragons, you have to know about them."

He cleared the table with his hand (now it was his drinking mug) and tossed down a book he had no doubt stored in his enormous back pocket. "The dragon manual. Everything we know about every dragon we know of."

I sneaked a glance over my shoulder to where everyone was. The twins and my idiot cousin didn't seem to care much about it. Fishlegs was nodding enthusiastically. Astrid looked up for a moment, but

immediately looked away once the initial interest had died away.

Thunder sounded, echoing around the hall. Gobber listened considerately. "No attacks tonight," he concluded. "Study up."

He left.

Tuffnut, who was trying to balance a dagger on the table, jolted. The weapon fell with a clatter. "Wait, you mean read?"

"While we're still alive?" asked his twin incredulously.

Snotlout banged the table violently. Seriously, he has anger management issues. "Why read words when you can just kill the stuff the words tell you stuff about." Okay, did I mention he's a bit on the simple-minded side too?

Fishlegs, on the other hand, was getting more and more excited. "I've read it, like, seven times! There's this water dragon that spits boiling water and your face, a-and another one that buries itself for like a week, and there's this one-"

"Yeah, cool," deadpanned Tuffnut while making a hand gesture that clearly said 'shut up.' "There was a chance that I was going to read itâ€|"

"â€|but nowâ€|" finished Ruff.

Fishlegs looked hurt. I would've given him a pat on the back, but that would probably ruin his reputation and my chances of ever being accepted by those guys.

Snot stood up and said decisively, "You guys read, I'll go kill things!"

Everyone but Astrid made sounds of protest and ran out of the hall after him. Fishlegs was saying something about a dragon that had a spine like trees. The door banged shut behind them; suddenly, it was a lot quieter there. Mustering my courage, I walked over to Astrid who now sat alone.

"So I guess we'll share?"

"Read it," she said, flicking the book towards me.

"O-oh, wow, all for me. Great, okay! I guess I'll see you-" The door slammed shut. I sighed. "â€|tomorrow."

a few hours laterâ€|

I was the last person in the Main Hall. It was well into the night, and the storm had continued to brew into a horrible lightning storm. I'd chosen to stay by the fire and dry off. No point in going back to an empty house just to have to start my own fire. Firewood is heavy, especially when it's stored in the village and the house is at the top of the hill.

Though the fires in the hall had died down quite a bit, they still held a warm, friendly glow. Most of the candles were lit too. I took

the nearest one and made my way back to the dinner table. The Book of Dragons was sitting right where Astrid had left it. Its leather-bound pages were whispering to me, telling me to open them up and read their contents.

I opened it to its first page. The table of contents.

"Dragon classifications," I read outloud. "Strike class, fear class, mystery classâ€¦"

There were more, but I decided to flip through it. Maybe I'm not obsessed like Fishlegs, but I've got some interests in dragons.

"The Thunderdrum. This reclusive dragon inhabits sea caves and dark tide pools. When startled, the Thunderdrum produces a concussive sound that can kill a man at close range. Extremely dangerous, kill on sight.

"Timberjack. This gigantic creature has razor-sharp wings that can slice through full-grown trees. Extremely dangerous, kill on sight.

"Scauldron." This must have been the one Fish was babbling about. "Sprays scalding water at its victim. Extremely dangerous."

Thunder sounded, making the hall shake. I gave a cry. The force of the storm had forced the doors to fly open and bang against the wall. Seeing that there was no immediate threat, I turned back to the book.

"Changewing. Even newly hatched dragons can spray acid. Kill on sight."

I began to flip through. "Gronckle. Zippleback. The Skrill. Bone Knapper. Whispering Death."

I frowned. Something about the book seemed very repetitive. "Burns its victims. Buries its victims. Chokes its victims. Turns its victims inside out. Extremely dangerous. Extremely dangerous. Kill on sight. Kill on sight. Kill on sight."

Then, there was a page with few words and no illustrations. Completely blank. I looked at the label and my blood ran cold. "Night Fury. Size: unknown. Speed: unknown. The unholy offspring of lightning and death itself. Never engage this dragon. Your only chance: hide and pray it does not find you."

I sat stone still. I didn't realize how little we Vikings knew about the Night Fury. No one had even seen its size or guessed its speed, let alone know what it looked like. I reached into my inner pocket and pulled out my notebook. The page was still marked from before.

I opened it and tossed the sketch over the blank page where one should've been. I was the first Viking to have any proof. Somehow, that was something I wanted to keep secret for now. Why, I do not know.

The Sea: Viking Raiding Party

Stoick the Vast, chief of Vikings, looked up from the map. Three

ships were there, full of all the able-bodied Vikings in Berk. They were bobbing in front of the fog that marked the untold boundary between man and beast. This was it. They were sailing before the maze of stone and fire, the surrounding clouds high as mountains and dark as Fate.

"I can almost smell them," he murmured to his brother, Spitelout.
"They're close."

He turned to the men on his ship. "Take us in."

"Hard to port. To Helheim's Gate." From the other two ships, the same cries came. "Hard to port! Hard to port! Steady!"

Within seconds, the ships were completely engulfed. No one could see one from the other, nor what was ahead or what came behind. It was an environment of fear, but no Viking would ever show fear in the eyes of danger. It was the way.

Stoick placed a hand on the hammer at his side, fingering it and praying to the gods for the best. He heard the sound of wings. Sharp wings. A Timberjack, most likely. The great leader pulled out his weapon and became ready in stance.

A bolt of fire shot down at them. He bellowed a ferocious battle cry and attacked.

Berk: Dragon Training Arena (Hiccup's POV)

It was another grey morning, and we were all in the ring. It had been transformed into a hectic maze of wooden boards. All the others were running through it, but I could hardly care. Now that I'd found the perfect vantage point to talk to Gobber from, I was badgering him about my findings the night before.

"Hey, you know, I just happened to notice the book had nothing on Night Furies. Is there, like, another book, or a sequel? Maybe a Night Fury pamphlet?"

A fireball came whizzing by, just missing me. Not my axe, however. The whole head was blown apart. Sorry Dad; looks like I won't be defending anyone anytime soon. At least I had my shield.

"Focus Hiccup!" Gobber shouted. I looked up to see a Deadly Nadder running at me. "You're not even trying!"

I ran. Right, left, right. The Nadder was above me, hopping from maze piece to maze piece. I was hoping there wasn't any dead ends.

Gobber, caring not of our potential fatality, was teaching. "Today's lesson is about attack! Nadders are quick and light on their feet. Your job is to be quicker and lighter."

The Nadder's attention diverted from me to Fishlegs. Its tail spikes stood straight and it fired an array of stunning needles at the poor guy. He was screaming, so I guess it meant he was still okay.

"I'm really beginning to question your teaching methods!"

Gobber ignored him, picking at his teeth. "Look for its blind spot. Every dragon has one. Find it, hide in it and strike!"

I ran past the twins and hid behind the corner as they ran into the Nadder. I peeked to watch. The dragon stared at the two and sniffed them. Ruffnut, unfortunately, caught a wiff of her brother too.

"Ugh, do you ever bathe?"

Well, Vikings aren't exactly the most cleanly of creatures. Tuff seemed to like that thinking. "If you don't like it, then just get your own blind spot."

She butted heads with him. "How about I give you one?"

When they chose to look up, they barely had a moment before a jet of fire came at them. I ran away as well.

"Blind spot, yes. Deaf spot, not so much." Gobber chuckled at his own humor. I came to a stop as I saw him.

"So, how would one sneak up on a Night Fury?"

He seemed really peeved to see me. "No one's ever done it and lived to tell the tale. Now get back in there!"

"Okay, okay, but hypothetically-"

"Hiccup!" I turned to the source of the loud whisper. It was Astrid. She was crouching with Snotlout. "Get down. The dragon's right there."

Snot nodded. I tiptoed over to them and knelt down beside them. Astrid was checking around the corner. I could hear the Nadder making its way through the maze. After a moment, her face turned into a determined scowl. She gave us the thumbs up.

Astrid tumbled gracefully to the next wall undetected. She used her shield as a lever. Snotlout followed without a hitch. I, on the other hand, didn't have enough arm strength to push off. The shield landed with a loud clank on the stone.

The Nadder noticed me and ran by, jaws snapping. It hopped up onto the tops of the walls and went after Astrid and Snotlout. I didn't see what happened, but the walls were thin enough that I could hear every word.

"Watch out, babe," said Snotlout cockily, "I'll take care of this."

Her indignant shout told me he'd shoved her out of the way. Trying to impress, obviously. Then there was a sound of metal hitting wood. So he missed. I swore the Nadder was laughing at him.

"The sun was in my eyes!" And now the cover-up. It was cloudy outside today. "What do you want me to do, block out the sun? I can do that, but I don't have time."

Astrid and the Nadder came barreling straight at me as Snotlout ran

down an adjacent path. Astrid turned left and the Nadder crashed into the wall. It was a perfect toppling effect. All the walls were falling around us. Snotlout, who was oblivious, was prattling off some nonsense about daytime and cats.

As my fellow peers went back into panic mode, I turned my attention back to Gobber. "Has anyone ever seen one napping?"

"Hiccup!" Gobber shouted, pointing.

Astrid was leaping over the mess of falling timbers, the Nadder right behind her. She shouted my name and came leaping at me. What, was I supposed to catch her? Instead, I landed heavily on my back. She fell on top of me, the force knocking the breath out of me. I groaned a bit.

As the dust cleared, Ruff and Tuff watched her trying to untangle our limbs. She wasn't gentle about it, I'll tell you that.

"Ooooh, love on the battlefield!" hooted Tuffnut.

Ruffnut scoffed. "She can do better."

"H-here, let meâ€|why don't youâ€|?"

Astrid ignored me and smacked my hand away. She pushed off with my chest (making me shut up again) and stood. The Nadder, which had flown into a pile of debris, was picking itself up again. It shook its head and looked ready to charge.

Astrid gasped and grabbed the hilt of her battle axe. Unfortunately, the blade was buried deep into my shield. She tried to yank it out, but the thing wouldn't budge. It hurt. A lot. I was shouting "ow ow ow" to deaf ears. Astrid then used her boot, pulled the shield off my arm, and stepped on my face before confronting the dragon. One swing later and my shield was no longer.

Neither was the Nadder's fighting will, it seemed. The creature shook its head and limped away.

"Well done, Astrid," said Gobber calmly.

Her breathing, panicky, subsided and she turned towards me with a cold glare. "Is this some kind of a joke to you? All of this training, is it for nothing in your eyes?"

I looked up from where I was curled up on the ground. "What do you mean?"

"Hiccup, grow up. You're going to be our chief someday. Dragons are the enemy, and we are your allies. We're not gonna be able to sit on the sidelines anymore. That means we don't have time for stupid fantasies like killing Night Furies."

"That wasn't what I mea-

Astrid cut me off by pointing her axe at me. "Our parents' war is about to become ours. Figure out which side you're on."

With that, she walked away, leaving me on the ground bearing the

stares from the others.

* * *

><p>Thank you for reading. If you have time, please write something for me in the magical box of joy right under this chapter. I actually read those words you guys to leave. Many make me feel good about myself! Too egotistical? Sorry.

If you have a chance, though, I do appreciate some feedback, even criticism. And thank you to anyone who's already done so before! _I promise you, I'm working as fast as I can with my busy schedule while trying to keep some quality to my work._

_Happy Early Super Bowl Sunday (for those who watch American football)! _

Sushi

5. Friendships: Forgiven, Forbidden, Forged

Hey guys! Slow update, I know. Totally inexcusable, but it should get better now that swimming's over. And I didn't die on my first IM, so added bonus!

_I wrote the most beautifullest scene of HTTYD of all time. If you read the last chapter, you know what's coming. That is all.
>As for RotG, I wanted to develop the Sandman and his friendship with Jack. I hope this works. That is all.

* * *

><p>5 " Friendships: Forgiven, Forbidden, Forgotten, Forged

* * *

><p>Part 1 " The Guardians

Somewhere Over the Sea: The Skyship (Jack's POV)

I wasn't about to sleep with that, after what Tooth'd said. And I didn't. For about a good hour or so.

Then I saw a golden light sweeping from the horizon to where I was sitting. Dream sand. Within an instant the Sandman materialized in front of me, rivers of yellow vanishing to nothing but a small cloud he stood upon, floating in front of the flying ship. He waved.

"Hey Sandy," I said back. "Long night?"

He shrugged and stood on top of the angel's head with delicate feet. I kept forgetting how tiny he really was, only about as high as my waist including his hair. The Sandman watched me fiddle with my staff for a bit. He tapped me on my shoulder and a question mark appeared over his head.

I sighed. "I dunno, Sandy. I wish I could tell you."

He raised an eyebrow as if to say 'try me.'

"Tooth told me today that all Guardians were resurrected from the dead. It seemsâ€¦|morbid, in a way. But if we were dead, how could the Man in the Moon choose us? There's gotta be a reason behind it."

Sandy nodded.

"So it's true? That we were chosen, I mean."

More nodding.

"Even meâ€¦|" I added hesitantly. "So why don't I know my purpose yet?"

He patted me on the shoulder comfortingly. I put my head in my hands and looked down at my feet to avoid his kind eyes. I normally don't have bouts of self-pity, but today had just been one of those days. Sandy stepped down so he was eye level to where I was sitting. He cocked his head sideways and smiled at me.

I looked up and smiled back weakly. "You know I'm usually not like this."

He shrugged; I guess the Sandman understood bad days too. Sandy took my hands, now void of my head, and began leading me to the cabins. I stopped long enough to retrieve my staff from where it was propped against the angel's head.

We went down the ladder to the first level of the ship's belly, which happened to be where everyone slept. Not that immortals need sleep all the time, but it's good to have a backup bed now and again. My room was the furthest away. Bad judgment on North's part considering I like flying down hallways at top speed while freezing everything below. Still, I walked down without causing a commotion.

Sandy opened the door to my room and beckoned me in. I followed him.

It wasn't much, but I really liked the effort North put into it. The floor and walls were the wood that the entire ship was made of, painted dark cherry, but hanging from said walls were landscape paintings of Russki villages on snowy days. Children were skating and sledding, the air filled with migrating birds, and the sun causing the blanket of snow to sparkle realistically. I felt like I could just walk in and start a snowball fight then. There was a rug on the floor, a desk with a chair and a bed bolted firmly down. All were decorated with navy blue cloth, little intricate snowflakes stitched into them.

I didn't have long to admire them though. Sandy was waving a hand in front of my face. He pointed to my bed.

I propped my staff against the wall by the door. "Umâ€¦|I'm not really that tired, soâ€¦|"

Sandy ignored me and sat at the foot of my bed. He pointed sternly at the pillow.

I put my hands up in defeat. "Alright, alright, I'll sleep. But why are you so determined to make me?"

The reply was literally the worst round of charades I could imagine. Sandy made a miniature figure of both himself and me out of sand. Then a trail of dream sand made its way to my head from his head. I nodded slowly. "Okay, you're going to give me a dreamâ€¦right?"

He cocked his head back and forth as if to say 'somewhat.' Trying again, Sandy made two pairs of hands handing something to each other.

"Rightâ€¦giving?" Sandy shook his head "Presenting? Borrowing? I dunno, you've gotta give me more here!"

And he tried. And tried. And tried. I'll spare you all the horrifying details, but after a few minutes I was done. I sat heavily on my bed and looked at the Sandman.

"All I've got is you, me, and a dream, and some action that looks like giving."

Sandy thought for a moment, then a light bulb appeared over his head (literally). He made the dream sand float over his head, then to mine without making any contact. He smiled expectantly.

"Youâ€¦think of a dream, and then float it over to meâ€¦?"

The Sandman's face became annoyed. With deadpanned eyes, he pushed me into a sleeping position and made a ball of golden sand materialize in his hand. Before I had a chance to struggle, I was out.

I wasn't expecting what came next, though.

â€¦RotGâ€¦..

_A storm was brewing in the distance. That's what I saw at first. I looked around slowly. _

I was standing by the sea. It was a choppy grey sort of sea, with dirty brown sand being tossed around in the air. The wind was whipping in circles. There was a forest to the west and a lighthouse to the north. Long grass grew where sand didn't dominate. To the top of a small hill was a small village. By the smell, I could say it was a place where fishermen lived. That, and the numerous boats and fishing nets lying along the beach.

And on the beach was a boy.

_I was about to walk over to him when a tug at my waist. The Sandman watched me with careful eyes, shaking his head. _

I frowned, confused. "What is this place? Who is that boy?"

He just gave me a look that said 'watch.'

"_Oi, Sandman!"_

_I turned. The young boy, barely older than nine or ten, looked up from the picture he was drawing in the sand as well. Though he was

obviously a normal human, I could see the strong resemblance of his features to the Sandman. He had a small button nose and a hard set to his lips that was undeniable, as well as dainty little hands and feet._ _His hazel eyes regarded the group of older kids before him._

"_Wait," I gasped. "Thatâ€|was you? As a kid?"_

_Sandy nodded. _

I then remembered what Tooth said. "Are you sharing your dream with me?"

The way he refused to meet my eyes confirmed my suspicions. Instead, Sandy watched the drama unfold.

There were six, all boys, sons of fishermen. Strong. And they were ganging up on poor little human Sandy.

"_Why don't you talk, Sandman? Too busy drawing pictures in the sand?" asked the first boy. He was a stout fellow, at least thirteen, with jet black hair and eyes the color of the sea. _

_The Sandy from then ignored them and continued to pick at the wet sand. The bigger boy kicked some in his face. _

"_I was talking to you, shrimp!" he bellowed. "What, are you too smart to say anything back? Or are you too weak?"_

_When he didn't reply, the boy looked at one of the others, a mousy creature of a human. _

"_Grab him. We need to treat silent boy here a lesson."_

The boy playing in the sand gave them a terrified look which was pointedly ignored. He struggle and kicked as the older boys grabbed at him. He even barred his teeth. But they managed to haul him up away from the shore and towards a nearby forest. Finally, Sandy bit hard into the arm of one of his captors.

He was immediately dropped with a yowl. The blond boy tried to run away, but he didn't make it far. His legs were weak, his heart pounding, and he tripped over a jutting tree root. He gasped and fell heavily on his front. He grabbed his leg, which was slightly twisted at an already swelling ankle.

"_There he is!" came a shout._

The boy trembled and hurried backwards. Then he hit a tree and realized he was trapped.

The beating didn't take too long, but it wasn't pretty. I don't know how I managed to watch. All I saw were fists flying and blood speckling those fists. I was disgusted, to say the least. If I could, I would've frozen them all in place.

_Then the clouds broke. Great, pelting raindrops fell from the sky in a sudden sheet. The boys began to scream and swear, running off towards their homes. The little golden-haired boy continued to sit on the ground and let the storm wash away the blood on his face, silent

tears mingling with those of the sky._

The scene changed.

Now the boy was at home. A very angry, and very intoxicated man, was beating him. The man was foaming from the mouth, cursing like there was no tomorrow.

"_You piece of shit! Why the fuck didn't you defend yourself? Grow up; be a fucking man! Fucking waste of space. You're the reason why your mother died, ya know? And why your sister is going to die to. 'Cause you and your silence is a fucking curse! You need ta find your voice, boy, or I swear to God you're gonna pay for the sin you've brought onto this family!"_

And the then-Sandy couldn't do more than quiver, taking the blows in silence. By the time his father was done, he was too weak to do more than cry and crawl away to the next room. A girl with his hair and eyes watched him. She was frail, nothing more than skin and bones, and pale as the moon. Her eyes shined with the light of a persistent fever. She reached out to her little brother.

"_Just hang through it," she whispered. "Once you're older, you'll find a way. Papa doesn't understand you didn't choose not to have a voice. He doesn't understand the doctor said Mama was too sick to survive after she had you. Don't listen to those mean words. For my sake, okay?"_

The boy nodded, tears rolling down his face. His sister patted the bed next to her and he clambered in. she hugged him with what little strength she had. "I bet you'll get your wish someday. I know you want to be able to talk."

He shook his head. The older girl looked at him questioningly. "No? Then what do you really wish for?"

He pointed at her.

"_Me?" She seemed a bit taken aback. "You wish for me?"_

He smiled.

"_Thank you." She smiled back. "You want to know my wish?"_

He nodded.

"_Wellâ€¦I've always wanted to go out at night on a boat when the moon is full. I want to see the ocean with my own two eyes. I want to feel the water in my hair and the sand under my feet like all the other kids." She sighed and started laughing. "Sound silly, doesn't it? You get to go to the sea every day, after all!"_

Sandy shook his head violently, black eyes opened as wide as they would allow.

"_Maria!" came a shout from the drunken father. "Are you hungry?"_

"_No," she replied faintly. "Give it to Sebastian. He needs it."_

A scoff. "That boy doesn't need to eat what I earn. He's old enough to make his own living."

I wouldn't've been shocked if the little Sandy had started crying, but he did just the opposite. His quivering lip stiffened into a determined scowl and his bruised features formed a frown. He turned so his back was to his sister and became lost in thought.

The scene changed again.

It was obvious some time had passed since the last time I saw Sandy/Sebastian. His hair had grown from its cropped cut to longer locks that fell past his eyes in a thick sheet of gold. He looked much healthier, no longer skin and bones. He wasn't as pudgy as he was now, though he hadn't grown much.

He was sitting by the ocean repairing a fishing net. No one bothered him. There wasn't a single person there. He finished in a minute, holding up the rope for proud inspection. Satisfied with what he saw, Sebastian gathered the net in his arms and ran off to a nearby home. He knocked on the door.

It was opened by a couple in their late forties. They both smiled when they saw him.

"_Why thank you Sebastian!" said the woman. "You really have talent for this, you know?"_

_He beamed. _

The man handed him some coins and a canteen. "Your pay, as promised."

Sebastian pointed at the canteen, confused.

"_For your sister. I heard she's getting better with each day. It's just some simple soup, but we got spices from the traders last week. They said it'd help with keeping her body warmer at night. And it's her fourteenth birthday. She deserves some presents, at least."_

He hugged them both around the waist before running off. The woman turned to her husband. "Do you think there's much hope for those two children? Especially with their father and mother gone?"

"_They'll be fine," he reassured. "Those two are tough. Maria was supposed to die years ago and now she's on the mend. And Sebastian smiles again. I can't remember the last time that's happened. Maybe he'll find his voice someday. Come inside, it's getting cold out."_

They went in.

The scene changed.

Maria, his sister, was walking. Her legs still shook, but by the smiles on both their faces it was miraculous. She looked ready to cry while leaning on her brother's shoulder.

"_Can we go out to the beach? Just for tonight, then I promise to stay in bed and eat the soup."_

Sebastian considered for a moment, then grabbed a heavy blanket and a wide-hooded cloak. He bundled up his sister tightly and nodded. She beamed.

"_Lead the way!"_

The scene changed.

The two kids were out on the beach. The sand was drier and still warmed from the sun. Though it was sunset then. Footsteps lead to where they were. Maria was sitting on a pier with her feet splashing on the surface. As for Sebastian, he was dragging a rowboat carefully concealed behind some grass.

Maria was surprised, but her smile took over. "Were you planning to take me out to sea? Just like my dreamâ€¦you remembered?"

He smiled and led her in. Sebastian pushed the boat out of the sand and into the ocean. Sandy and I followed on a cloud of dream sand. They went out quite far, until the village was only a small collection of lights on the horizon. Still, Sebastian didn't stop rowing until they were well out. He stopped, panting, and smiled while pointing to the sky.

Maria followed his finger and gasped. I looked up. The sky was obviously younger than the one I knew. The moon was a few days away from full, but it radiated in an almost perfect sphere. There were stars too, and no clouds to cover their glory.

Then there was a wave. We all looked down and Maria squealed out in joy. There was a humpback whale rising lazily to the surface. Its eye watched with an ancient calamity about it. As if it could see a horrible fate awaiting the two in the boat.

The two didn't sense a thing. They reached out eagerly to touch the rubbery skin of the whale. It allowed them that before departing slowly. Their eyes met once the creature had gone back to its depths; both were breathless and happy.

"_Thank you," whispered Maria as though breaking the silence would somehow ruin the mood. "This was the perfect birthday."_

Sebastian hugged her. Before long they were asleep as their boat bobbed out further and further to the open ocean.

"_Oh no," I murmured._

The scene changed.

Sebastian had a hold on the oars, pulling as hard as he could. He was struggling and panting from exertion. The sun was high in the air, so I assumed he'd been at it for at least four or five hours. But the sun wasn't out for long. I could see storm clouds in the distance.

I turned to Sandy, who was watching the memory (I assumed these were all memories) with an eerie calmness about him. "This is you, isn't it? I know it's you. So why are you showing me this?"

He didn't reply.

The scene changed.

Now the village could be seen in the distance. People were gathered on all of the shoreline, but couldn't go any further. Grey waves were heaving. The sea had transformed from the night before to a place of terror. And in this frothing monster of water was one little rowboat.

I left Sandy's side and flew out to where the boat was. Thankfully, both Sebastian and Maria were there. But it didn't look pretty. Maria was huddled in heavy wet blankets while her nearly-exhausted-enough-to-pass-out brother was still rowing with all of his might.

I'd never felt this powerless before. Even though no one can see me, it hurt to have to watch these two lives hanging in the balance by a thread.

A few of the strongest men were swimming out to save them, shouting words of encouragement and commands to hold on. Which they did.

_Then the boat capsized. _

I gasped and flew into the water. It battered around my body, but it wasn't like I had to breathe or anything so I went to find them. It wasn't hard. Sebastian surfaced, shouting for help, as his sister held on to him. But her grip was slipping as the blankets dragged her down. And with a cry she vanished.

A man made it to Sebastian, but he pushed away and dived down. I watched as he held his breath for nearly a minute before he made it to Maria. With the last bit of strength he had, he pulled the heavy cloth from around her. Their eyes met briefly and the boy smiled; for a moment there, I saw Sandy in him, hair sticking up like a wild golden halo and face happy as a dream.

Then the moment ended as Sebastian pushed his sister to the surface, which caused him to shoot down even deeper.

I couldn't watch him go, so I came up to where the fishermen were. Of the four there, two were going back to shore with Maria safely with them while the other two continued to search the waters. Somehow I knew they would never see the boy again.

Back on shore, Maria was coughing up water. Women were busy getting blankets and warm clothes, organizing where to take her and what to feed her. She wasn't listening. She was screaming with what breath she had, crying for her lost brother.

The scene changed for one last time.

_It was night out and the sky was lit by a full moon. On a southern beach where the sand was gold lay a body. Though it was face-down, I knew who it was. It was bloated and disfigured from absorbing too much water yet the shape was similar to Sandy's build. _

_Then a ray of moonlight shined down on him. Much like I had been

reborn, Sebastian's corpse glided up to meet the sky. As it did, the surrounding sand went with it, encasing it in the familiar folds of Sandy's robes, sticking the hair in the spikes they were today. With this, the body looked much less disfigured._

A voice, the voice I had heard during my rebirth spoke. "Rise, first of my guard, to save the children from the nightmares that dominate their lives. Rise, and protect their dreams as you did your sister's."

And with that Sebastian/the Sandman's eyes opened, wide and glowing with purpose.

â€|..RotGâ€|..

I gasped as I woke up violently. I'm not one to overreact or anything, but even I could feel tears coming as I felt the raw pain and terror of what I'd just seen. I turned to Sandy.

"What the hell! Was thatâ€|was that what you went through?" I asked. "You, and your sister, and all the other bullies, and your dad? Just because you couldn't speak?"

Nod.

"And you had to take care of Maria without any help from anyone?"

Nod nod.

"You drowned to save your sister? For her dream?"

He nodded more.

"Thank you. You were sharing a dream with me, right? Tooth told me you could." When he nodded, I asked, "Why did you show it to me?"

Then Sandy pointed to his chest, right where his heart was located. His golden eyes met my ice blue ones, and he smiled sadly. I didn't need words to comprehend him. The Sandman could sense my understanding. His smile became a happy one. With a silent wave, he departed.

And now I knew why he was who he was. That was how he discovered his center. That's why good old Sandy was the Guardian of Dreams. And now, more than ever, I was determined to find my center too. I had a score to settle with Pitch about my teeth. I was ready to face my own past now.

* * *

><p>Part 2 â€" The Vikings

Berk: The Cove (Hiccup's POV)

It was late afternoon by the time I was able to sneak out of the village. All I brought with me was a spare white shield and a fairly large fish - Icelandic cod, to be specific. Astrid's words were still ringing through my head, and after training I couldn't bear to stay

near anyone I knew. Especially my fellow classmates.

Figure out which side you're on.

My side...

It was as though no one really wanted me anywhere. I was a poor excuse of a Viking. I had no skills at anything besides metalwork and sewing, with some adequacy in fishing. But that was it. I couldn't perform when it mattered: anything related to injuring a dragon. Unless you counted the Night Fury I was able to shoot down. And anyway, that was an accident.

However, no one can take accidents for granted.

I decided on one thing: this dragon was the only one ever to be seen alive. If I couldn't kill it, the best I could do was observe and document it. That would count for something in Berk, even for a little worthless hiccup like me—right?

Slipping down to the cove, I couldn't see hide or wing of the Night Fury anywhere. Cautiously, I hid behind two large rocks spaced apart enough for me to stand comfortably between and still be safe from a dragon's jaws and claws (though probably not the fire). Deeming myself safe, I took a deep breath and threw the fish out. It landed heavily and sat there for a few seconds.

No Night Fury came attacking it. Huh. I poked my head out and looked around; no sign of it still. I tried to exit with my shield, but it got stuck. I pushed a bit, but it didn't budge. Slipping under the shield I pulled from the other side. Nothing. I sighed, shoulders slumped, and turned back to the fish. Come to think of it, I probably should've pushed the shield back and turned it sideways, but the past's the past.

I picked the fish up and began taking a slow lap around the lake, eyes peeled for a certain midnight dragon. It didn't take long. Hearing the rustle of wings unfurling, I turned around and gasped. The Night Fury was perched atop a rock fixture, watching me with cold, calculating eyes. I stiffened, fish clutched to my chest in a viselike grip. The dragon hopped down lightly. Its eyes never left me.

I held out the fish with one hand as far as I could. The Night Fury approached cautiously. It seemed to relax slightly as it opened its mouth, but then it noticed something flash from my belt and jerked away, growling, eyes narrowing.

My blood ran cold with fear and my breath came out in short pants. I'd forgotten about the dagger I had tucked away there from training earlier. Fish held safely to my chest with my left arm, my right hand opened my vest. The dagger gleamed as the sunlight reflected off of its smooth metal surface. I slowly reached down and touched the hilt.

The Night Fury growled even more menacingly, body crouched into an attack position. I saw its sharp teeth glinting in the fading light. Now it was my turn to panic again. I angled my body so the weapon was away from the dragon. Using only my fingertips, I pulled the blade out, held it arm's length away, and let it drop. The Night Fury

gestured with its head that clearly said 'get rid of it.' And I did. Carefully balancing the dagger on my foot, I tossed it into the lake.

Then the strangest thing happened. After the metal splashed into the water, the Night Fury looked at me in an acknowledging sort of way. Its pupils dilated and its body relaxed. It seemed...innocent.

Suddenly, I was less afraid. I held out the fish once again, but this time with both hands. The Night Fury took small, tentative steps towards me. Its body moved from its hind legs first, then its front so it looked like it was coiling and uncoiling like a length of rope. The dragon's head reached as far as it could when its body straightened, less than a _foot _away. Its mouth opened. The Night Fury's tongue was forked, mouth pink. Strangely enough, there were no teeth. Just divots along its gums.

"Toothless," I murmured. "Huh, I could've sworn you had-"

Ends up its teeth were retractable. The Night Fury's teeth came out as its head shot forward. The fish which had previously been in my hands vanished in two bites. It regarded me with narrow-pupiled eyes while licking its chops.

"-teeth," I finished lamely.

The Night Fury's attention turned back towards me. It walked forward. Instinctively, I stumbled back on my feet until I fell heavily on my backside, then continued to scramble away until my back was against another mossy rock. What was with this dragon and pinning me against boulders anyway?

"Ah...no no no," I stuttered. Then I managed to whisper, "I-I don't have any more."

It, like everyone I knew, seemed to ignore my comment. Instead, the Night Fury's eyes rolled back into its head. A hacking sound came from deep in its throat. Then its mouth opened and the tail end of the fish fell into my lap with a notable squish.

My disgust was well masked.

The Night Fury leaned back onto its hind legs and, using its tail as a prop, sat. It watched me, head cocked slightly to one side, never blinking. I shifted into a more comfortable position and continued to sit there with the fish in my lap, unsure how to interpret the situation. The Night Fury kept watching. I began to fidget and look away, biting my bottom lip nervously. Did dragons normally behave like this?

Berk: The Cove (Toothless's POV)

Were all humans this, well, slow?

Did I really have to spell it out for this pitiful creature? It was customary for one who saves a life to gain a reward from the one saved. Granted, half a fish wasn't much, but it was all I had to offer after starving for three days. Was he really that arrogant as to not accept this offering?

But the human did save my lifeâ€¦I guess it deserved my help in explaining customs. Perhaps its people didn't have such rituals.

How primitive...

Berk: The Cove (Hiccup's POV)

I caught the Night Fury's glance. It looked down pointedly at the half-fish and then back at me. Did it expect me to eat it?

Sighing, I picked up the slimy morsel and took a sizable bite out of it. The fish squished noticeably, though I tried not to notice it. A strand of dragon saliva connected me to the soft, raw flesh. The dragon still watched me with scrutiny, so I made a very fake appreciative 'mmm.' I tell you, it's really hard to do with a mouth full of regurgitated fish and cheeks puffed out like a summer squirrel.

The fins on the side of the Night Fury's head (were they ears or feelers?) perked up after I did that. I smiled and offered the fish back while continuing to make stupid noises. Why was I even trying to communicate to it? It's not like dragons can understand words anyway.

Then the dragon swallowed. My half-smile vanished and was replaced by a look of you've-got-to-be-kidding-me-ness. Really? Well, if it gained the trust of a Night Furyâ€¦

I breathed in deeply through my nose, eyes closed, physically (and quite a bit mentally, I'll admit) preparing myself. It took two attempts to swallow the fish. The first time, it stuck and threatened to come back up. My eyes bulged as I tried to keep it down. Thankfully, I succeeded. Once the fish was safely in my stomach, I shuddered and cringed on the aftertaste.

It licked its chops in a questioning way. Asking if the fish was to my liking. It wasn't, but I wasn't about to tell the world's most deadly dragon that I hated its food. Instead, I smiled. It was a normal smile: lips parted, toothy, and as awkward as I was.

The Night Fury seemed to frown at me. Its eyes narrowed and it leaned forward slightly with its head cocked. I continued to smile, finding it actually helped with overcoming the taste.

Then it tried to smile too.

I watched, my own grin fading away slowly in shock as it showed me its upturned gums. It seemed so different from the monster I was taught it was. I wasn't sure what came over me next. Just so suddenly, I felt the need to make contact with it. I shifted up onto my knee into a half-crouch, arm extended towards the dragon.

As I reached out, though, its gaze became menacing again and it hissed, teeth out and barred. It flew crookedly to the other side of the lake, a throaty screech resonating around the stone walls of the cove as it fell. It landed steadily though, as if accustomed to flying strangely, and shook its head slightly.

I dashed over, eager to learn more.

Berk: The Cove (Toothless's POV)

I somehow managed to land after my minor rage. First the human frees me, and in return he asked for my soul? How in the sky's name did that work? One doesn't casually fly, or in this case walk, up to another and just expect contact of both body and mind! This harmony was not right for any reason whatsoever!

I thought for a moment. Perhaps the human didn't understand what it was doing. Yes, that seemed reasonable enough. It didn't understand the simple custom of gifting; how would it comprehend the intensity of a soul-binding. And last I checked, human minds were too weak to speak telepathically like all other creatures could.

I wanted to think it over, but I was tired. Perhaps sleeping would be a good idea, considering escape from this place seemed near impossible. I huffed and shot a jet of flames onto the ground. It burned and hardened underneath me. Warm. I settled down onto it, relaxing.

A small white bird sang a song of twitters above my head. I watched as it left its nest and flew off over the lake and out of the Cove. How I dreamed to do that too as my eyes followed its path to freedom.

When I turned, the human was there. It was a pitiful thing really, nothing but skin and bones. Feeble for its kind. And it seemed young, perhaps still but a fledgling. It sat before me with its lower limbs crossed and did the strange thing with its mouth again. I sensed no hostility, but I was quite annoyed by its persistence in following me.

I sighed and lay so my head wouldn't face it. Closing my eyes, I covered my body with my wing and hid my face with my tailfin for good measure. Though this was a simple action among most races to leave one alone, this human obviously didn't understand manners. I could hear it scooting closer and closer to me.

I uncovered my eye and watched it. As I had suspected, he was reaching out for me again. Was it really so naïve? With my eyes upon it, the fledgling human turned and walked away stiffly. My eyes narrowed and I growled. Could I really not get a good afternoon's rest? Was it that hard for the human to understand?

I sighed and went over to a nearby tree. Though sleeping by tail was slightly more uncomfortable, if it meant peace and quiet I was willing to take it.

It didn't take long for me to rest. But I woke up while the sun was still up. Strange, this never happened before. Then I noticed the human was still there. And it was doing something I'd never observed a human doing before. What was this action? Curiosity took the better of me and I went to observe.

Berk: The Cove (Hiccup's POV)

The sun was setting. The water reflected gold from the last parting rays, sky washed a faded purple-blue and clouds tinted pink. With what remaining time I had before the others would be expecting me

back at the village, I'd decided to draw. I didn't tell anyone I was artsy " unless you weren't the chief's son, it was usually frowned upon to be "too weak to use a weapon" or "too into the girly arts of cooking and sewing." Unfortunately, I fit into the category perfectly. I drew for fun, and the sewing and cooking had become my untold house chores after Mom died.

I sat down on a nearby rock. It wasn't that hard, what with the moss growing on it like a damp green cushion. I took a nearby stick and began scratching away. It was a quick sketch in the dirt; I'd forgotten my notebook at home that day. Simply a drawing of the dragon I'd met that day. A Night Fury with its pointed head and large, watchful eyes.

I heard a shuffle next to me, followed by a snuff. I froze momentarily, but continued working. The Night Fury was watching my stick move over my right shoulder. I could see it looking back and forth from the shadow it cast over my right shoulder. Then it left.

The next sound I heard was that of a fairly large branch being yanked out of the water. I spun around; the Night Fury had a whole tree limb, leaves and all, in its mouth. Water streamed from the rough bark and the green leaves fluttered in the movement. It dragged the branch with its mouth, balancing on its hind legs.

I watched, enthralled, as the dragon imitated my drawing. It spun in circles, leaving deep crevices wherever the tree branch went. Line after line appeared. The Night Fury turned towards me, then back at its creation, leaving a dot. It continued its swirling. The Night Fury's movements were graceful, though the movements were those unpracticed. It ran with dedication. The sapling smacked me on the head as it came by, but I hardly noticed. I was too amazed by what I saw.

The Night Fury nodded and purred at the mess of lines before it. I stood up and looked around on the ground. There wasn't any decipherable picture, never mind a pattern of some sort. But I did gather this dragon was intelligent. It had the ability to mimic, both smiling and drawing. Still following all of the lines with my eyes, I took a few steps forward for a better angle.

A growl cut through my train of thought. I flinched; my right foot was planted firmly on one of the lines. Looking up apologetically, I lifted my foot. Arms outstretched, I held my balance on my left and watched the Night Fury. It relaxed and began to coo from its throat again.

I decided to try something. I placed my foot back on the line. Growl. Then I lifted off of it. Purr. On again, growl again. Off and purr. On, growl. Off, purr. Purr " I stepped over the line.

I could almost feel the tension relax. Smiling, I looked back down at my feet and stepped carefully over stroke after weaving stroke. Sweeping and swirling over the hard-packed dirt. I spun and circled with them, barely making a sound as I stepped on the balls of my feet, my arms still stretched out to my sides to keep my balance. Endless.

And then, without warning, I felt the hair on the back of my head get

blown by a sudden warm gust of wind. But it wasn't wind. I crouched slightly, instinctively knowing what was behind me. I turned ever-so slowly around.

The Night Fury sat there, its green eyes with their blown-up pupils watching me intensely. They were kind eyes, not those of a monster. The eyes that greeted me with the fish and the gummy smile. Once again, I felt the sudden urge to reach out and touch it. So I raised my arm, palm facing towards it. The Night Fury refused to make eye contact. It snuffed and began to growl a little, backing away from me. I gasped and pulled my hand away. The dragon relaxed again and watched me, cooing from the back of its throat.

Maybe it didn't feel comfortable with me staring? I turned away. My head was down, but my arm was up. It was the longest few breaths of my life as I stood there, unsure what would happen and putting all my trust into a beast I was supposed to fear and kill. There, in the fading light, I stood blind and awaited my fate.

Berk: The Cove (Toothless's POV)

This human really was something else.

I'd never seen one act like this around a dragon of any sort before. I knew it was the one who allowed me to go after claiming he was but another mindless killer of its clan. Still, the fact that it had come back and still trusted me with its hand out and eyes closed was quiteâ€¦amazing.

Here I was, amazed by a human. Never had I though this would be possible.

And it stood there. With it before me again, I could see how frail and small it was, yet how brave its heart and soul could be. I don't think the human fledging was quite aware what his hand meant. How easily he was holding it out, to form a sacred bond of souls.

Never had I thought of doing it. It was but a legend, from a story of mankind and dragonkind sharing their hearts and minds, to become united for better and for worse. I never knew what it meant until now.

I could sense this human fledging, this _boy_, truly understanding the magnitude of its action deep down in its subconscious. And I accepted it in mine.

I closed my mind and allowed my snout to meet its hand physically. With it, my mind met its mind; not in a flawless way, but enough to feel its emotions and see its past. I breathed in slowly.

Then I saw _him_. The real one inside. And everything about him.

Hiccup.

Berk: The Cove (Hiccup's POV)

Then it happened. I felt its snout make contact with my hand. A shock coursed through my body as it did. I couldn't believe it. The Night Fury touched me. It touched me.

_He _touched me.

It was as though something in my mind had shattered and fallen away, but not in a bad way. It was as though I could see more and think more. I felt a presence tug at my mind. _His_ presence. The Night Fury's.

Not quite believing what had just happened, I looked up. Sure enough, my hand was resting on his warm snout. The Night Fury's eyes were closed, but I could sense he felt me watching. Slowly, his head came away and his eyes opened. They were friendly eyes, trusting with their gaze.

Then he snorted and blinked. There again was the gaze of a Night Fury. Pupils turned to hostile slits and it slipped away with inhumane speed. But I didn't care that much. My arm dropped back to my side, palm tingling from the lingering ghost of the event. I thought about what had just occurred.

_Figure out which side you're on. _

And suddenly, it didn't matter anymore what Astrid had said, the shame I felt when she said it. None of it mattered anymore. Because now I knew.

I was on _his_ side.

* * *

><p>Oh gods, I can't believe I actually wrote that! Now we know Sandy's past (at least, what I wanted to be his past; I've never read the books so I wouldn't know). And I will admit I watched that scene from HTTYD at least ten times, frame-by-frame, just to get it right. And with Toothless's POV, was it okay?

And I didn't start the Guardians' half of the chapter until I got the HTTYD scene perfect (i.e. yesterday). Like, close enough for me to consider it presentable to the world. I'm sorry if that part seemed rushed. Next chapterâ€|the plot thickens. Ominous~

_Review; it keeps the bad thoughts in my closet at bayâ€|
;)_

__Sushi__

6. Meticulous Plot, Melting Ice, Moving Sky

_Hey guys. _

I know I said last Saturday, but last Saturday became this Saturday, and Saturday became yesterday, and yesterday became today, and so on and so forth, so happy Wednesday! My life has been waaaay to busy lately. But that's how it goes, eh? Still, this lateness is inexcusable. Sorry!

By the by, I felt inspired enough to attempt my first one-shot. If you're okay with M-rated stuff and like Hetalia, check it out â€" it's Spamano~

Welcome back to more story! Now we get into the minds of Pitch Black and the Green Death (enter evil laughter here). Then we continue with the journeys of our two unlikely heroes. Sucky chapter summary, I know. Just read the actual thing!

* * *

><p>6 " Meticulous Plot, Melting Ice, Moving Sky

* * *

><p>Prologue " Pitch Black

North of Berk: The Nest

Pitch Black paced around the halls of the volcano calmly, lost in a deep shadow of thought. It had been ten years to the day since he'd first made his permanent residence in the Nest north of the island of Berk. Though the decorations in his newer home were sparse, he could make do with it. Pitch wasn't much for fire either, but he couldn't deny the power of the element.

At the moment, though, he didn't care. He was busy plotting.

Pitch was thinking about the raid to Toothiana's palace. A success, of course. Yet who he'd seen there was quite remarkable. Jack Frost, the loner. What he was doing with the Guardians Pitch Black had no idea, but it wasâ€|contradictory to the common belief. That belief that Jack Frost didn't care about anyone but himself.

Or maybe this belief still held true. Perhaps the Man in the Moon had forced Jack into a contract. Now that would make an interesting twist. And if he were still unstable, unsure whether or not becoming a Guardian was meant for himâ€|

Pitch's thoughts were interrupted by a voice echoing from the chasm below. **_**Boogeyman.**_**

He frowned; what on earth could she want with him now? However, ignoring her would do him no good. She was the reason he had a chance at a future after all.

Pitch turned, hands folded behind his back, and faced the very heart of the mountain. Heat erupted from below, blowing the few strands of hair falling over his forehead back. He hated it, the way it caressed his skin with its cloying volcanic ash. But one must sacrifice comfort for power sometimes, and once Pitch had power there was no need to deal with this place again.

"Your highness," he said lazily, checking his nail while doing so.

I amâ€|concerned about something that has come up recently, ****said the echoing voice.**_**** Something that displeases me very much.**_**_**

Well, that was different. "What is it?"

I have lost all contact with your beast.****

"The Night Fury?" Pitch asked. Then he laughed. "The most powerful of your warriors? Surely not, your highness. It is without doubt loyal at the very least. It's not like it's got a mind of its own, aside from the orders you give it."

**You try to comfort me, but I'm afraid it is true. It normally comes back every day.** _**Yet **__**I could not reach the Night Fury for two nights.**_

"Perhaps your powers have weakened. Being stuck in a volcano can do that to even the best of us."

She growled. _**That isn't funny.**_

"It wasn't meant to be," replied Pitch coolly.

There was silence for a few moments, then:

**How did your raid go?**

The pale man smiled. "Very well, much better than I'd expected. There were no casualties on our end. As for the Guardians, it seems they are getting old. The Man in the Moon felt the need to hire a new member to his little 'moonlight guard.'"

**Who?**

"Jack Frost."

**The loner? The one who brings ruin to the lands of the north?**

"I'm afraid so. Interesting choice though, isn't it. If there was anyone less qualified, it would be that boy. He has no care for children aside from pranks and snowball fights." Pitch chuckled. "Besides, he has much less fighting power than the rest. He has no center, and no reason to be chosen. From what I've gathered, he doesn't even have memories of his past. And they're all here, in my pocket."

Pitch Black pulled out a little metal box from his robes. It was like all the others he'd collected over the years: small, gold, patterned with Tooth's signature diamond-patterns, with a painting of Jack Frost on the front. Though this boy had chocolate-brown hair, the mischievous grin was undeniable.

_**You still plan on it then? **_she asked. _**To bring this Jokul Frosti to our side using that.**_

"I do." Pitch replaced the box to his inner pocket. "Though he is weak now, I sense potential. The Man in the Moon must have too. Why else would he choose Jack? The boy is like metal â€" temper him just right and he could become whatever we need him to be. Yet the Guardians are trying to do this too. The longer he's with them, the worse."

The she-demon seemed to consider this. _**Will you interfere soon, Boogeyman?**_

"Probably. But first, we must find this Night Fury that troubles you so."

"**I can do that. My powers do not wane yet. And the human children you have taken over the years have helped me to immunize their effects on my control. I will send a few scouts out to find the dragon. I want you to get this boy out of the way.**"

"There's nothing for you to fear of him," he replied with a frown.

The voice seemed to sigh. _**I am wary of humans and spirits alike. This is an ancient land. I still remember times three hundred years in the past, before humans made their way here. This was a place of gods and beasts, those who trapped me here. I wish to leave this place soon. The sooner the better. I ache to feel the wind in my wings and the sea on my scales. You take too long to make this a reality. **_"

"Patience, your highness. We need to make sure all the details are perfect," Pitch stated. "I've learned from the last time I tried to get the Guardians out of power. Taking away the powers of the Tooth Fairy and the Easter Bunny weren't enough then. Now I will illuminate their strongest member."

"**Easier said than done.**"

"Of course. But with your help this can become a much more achievable task. Besides, the Guardians have lost their biggest weapon against us: the children. Of the eighty-four we have all but six. And they are older now â€" almost too old to believe in their childhood cares. And with our possession of their memories, they've lost the key to unlocking those values."

"**I'm still unsure about your thinkingâ€"|"**"

"And those teeth are what'll allow the ship to travel so far up north where children don't believe in the Guardians. It's foolproof."

"**If you're so sure about that then I am in no position to stop you. I just have one question. How is any of this helping me? All I gather is you and your plotting revenge on the Guardians.**"

"You must understand we both benefit from this," said Pitch smoothly. "By taking the children, there will soon be no more Vikings left to hunt you and your little workers. And the fear they all emit is simply revitalizing for me. Before long, I will have enough power to control the minds of these humans. Then I will conquer the south."

"**And our promise. Surely you do not forget the promise you have made me and my children, Boogeyman.**"

Pitch nodded. "Of course not, gracious Queen, you will have your reign as well. All of the land north of the capital will be yours for the taking. Your dragons will have no trouble finding the food that is so scarce in this corner of the globe."

_"**Tell me again, **_hissed the voice. _**Tell me of the lands south

of my control. Tell me what they are like.**_

"Most of the land there is green most of the year. Only a few areas are like these islands you plunder from. The rest have four distinct seasons, where the grass grows for nine months instead of three. The sun allows enough warmth for even the weaker of humans to enjoy their lives in comfort.

"As for the food, there is more than just sheep and wild birds. There are great creatures there: cows, buffalo, deer, elk, moose, and hundreds upon hundreds of different species of birds and fish to eat. You will never grow hungry. And once I take the throne I will lift the curse that has trapped you on this island. With this, you're area of control will increase tenfold. Well past the mountains, I should hope."

**A glorious place it seems.**

"That it is." Pitch allowed himself to melt back into the shadows of the room. "I should depart now. There is much work to be done if winter is to be tamed."

**Wait, before you go, I have but one question.**

"Ask away, my Queen."

**What do you plan to do with these teeth you stole? **

"I plan to keep them," he answered simply.

The voice seemed to frown._** "But what good will that bring us?"**_

"Pitch Black grinned wickedly."We must wait and seeâ€|"

* * *

><p>Part 1 â€" The Guardians

The Aurora Borealis: Somewhere Over the Sea (Jack's POV)

I came to when the sun came up. By then, there was already a commotion above on deck. The sun was shining blindingly in my eyes; I groaned and pulled the covers over my head. Somehow it felt so normal to do that, like I'd done it all my life. But I'd never felt so tired in the morning before. The joy of being an immortal.

Sighing, I whipped the blankets off. I was greeted by more light glinting off a mirror in the corner of the room; strangely enough, I hadn't noticed it before. I picked up my staff and went over to it. The thing sat there innocently. I picked it up gingerly â€" heavier than I'd thought â€" and it immediately became rimmed with frost on the edges.

My reflection stared back at me, tousle-haired and bleary-eyed. I blinked and looked closely at my features. My skin was pale, paler than any living person's, to the point where it looked bluish. Yet I could see pink threading its way through my face. I still had blood then; so my heart was doing more than just pumping the occasional adrenaline. My silvery hair reflected a sharp platinum white, flying

as though the wind had teased it permanently. It looked soft, like snow. I smiled; pearly white teeth winked back at me, straight and perfect. I ogled at myself for some time. It'd been a while since I'd looked in a mirror after all.

It seemed strange to do this. I set the mirror back down and gripped the familiar wooden crook of my staff. I couldn't help but think of Sandy's story. How he'd drowned and awoke new and, well, Sandy. How did he manage?

Tooth said that we were all revived from the dead by the Man in the Moon. Was that the reason I was abandoned without any recollection of my past? Did MiM think I couldn't take whatever it was that I'd gone through? Or was it a happy past, that I would miss so much I wouldn't be able to move forward because I'd be too busy dwelling back on it?

And would my memories really unlock the memories of my past? Maybe it was just a wild goose chase for nothing! I groaned and slammed my head against the wall. Not that it did me much good, save a killer headache. Rubbing my temple, I sighed and skated out the door.

Something flew into my face. I let out a *somewhat* manly shout and slid under the something. It squeaked and braced for impact. Wait, squeaked?

I sat up with my legs crossed. A tiny fairy fluttered down from where my head had just been. Her body relaxed once she realized she hadn't hit me. I held out my palm and she landed in it. Though all of these little workers Tooth had looked practically identical, I somehow recognized her as the one from yesterday. Don't ask me how I knew; I just did.

"Baby? Hey, it's okay. What were you doing in such a rush anyway? Trying to snap a picture of me sleeping to your sisters?"

I couldn't help but laugh a little at her indignant look. She stood up as high as her tiny figure could on my palm and glared at me. She wasn't a fainter then. Good.

I brought my hand up to my shoulder. She hesitated for a moment before fluttering into the opening between my neck and the hood of my hoodie. I could feel the quiver of her wings and her dainty little feet brushing against the back of my neck. Baby Tooth came up onto my shoulder and looked at me expectantly.

"Yeah yeah, I'm going up!" I gather the wind and shot down the now-empty hallway. Getting to the ladder, I flew straight up and barely an inch away from Phil, who was about to climb down.
"Morning!"

The brown yeti looked ready to strangle me. I guess years (at least fifty) trying to break into Santoff Claussen wasn't exactly the best way to get on a furry guy's good side. He warbled away angrily, arms flailing, before finally giving up and walking away. I shrugged and continued up, though I chose the traditional way of climbing this time. Which is pretty complicated with a staff, mind you.

The first thing that hit me was the roaring of the wind as I poked my

head out from under the trapdoor. It flung me against the propped-open wood. Baby Tooth took cover in my hood. Then I realized this wind was a storm. A great big tropical storm.

I flew out into it, completely exhilarated. C'mon, I storms are way fun! It's awesome to get into one that isn't cold enough to cause a blizzard. Rain pounded me from every angle, freezing and falling as ice as it did so. I whooped and dove through the clouds like nobody's business. It was amazing!

"Jack!"

I looked down to the shout. It came from North, who was trying to steer the ship.

"Jack!" he called again. "Calm the winds!"

Well, I guess fun didn't last that long. Sighing, I hovered above the crow's nest of the ship and spread my arms to the side. The great mass of clouds slowly parted, sunlight streaking through the sudden crack. The effect was cool and I almost let the storm go back to its natural air flow. But I didn't. I wasn't planning on killing anyone. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath, concentrating on keeping the winds at bay.

North was guiding the ship through the break I made. It wasn't impossible, making the break, but it was tiring. I control winter weather, not rain. As much as I was able to it was taking its toll. When we made it through I floated down to the crow's nest and started panting. I don't sweat (too cool for that; I know, punny) but if I could I bet I would've been the immortal human version of Niagara Falls.

Baby Tooth crawled out of my hood (was she really still there?) and patted me gently. I smiled. "Thanks Baby. I guess that one was something, huh?"

She twittered something before perching on my shoulder again.

Just then Phil marched over to the bottom of the ladder leading up to where I was slouched. I looked down and smiled at him. He glared up at me for a moment before giving me a thumbs up. I waved back wearily. So I guess he didn't completely hate me after all.

Tooth and Sandy joined me a few moments later. I was pulled into a tight hug by the first.

"Oh Jack, that was amazing! I didn't know you could control elements like that!"

"Just wind and ice," I said.

She pulled away, a smile brightening her features. "Now Bunny can finally come out! I thought he was going to die with all the turbulence. He was moaning so badly."

"Now I wish I'd seen that!"

We shared a laugh until North climbed up the ladder to the crow's nest to join us. He was beaming too. "I am proud of you. You did

good."

"Thanks North," I mumbled sheepishly. I shrugged. "At least you weren't about to die like Bunny."

As if on cue, Sandy tugged my sleeve and pointed down. We all turned to see Bunnymund's ears poke out of the trapdoor. His face followed, green eyes scanning his surroundings nervously. I would've burst into tears of laughter if I didn't have more self-control.

Then I had an idea. An awful, wicked, horrible, awesome idea.

Floating down from my perch in the basket, I snuck up behind Bunny. He didn't notice me as he slowly climbed out on shaky legs. Mustering all the power I had (which wasn't much after that whole ordeal) I shot a single well-aimed gale at his back.

Bunny fell. Imagine a spread-eagle about-to-cry-from-fear Pooka lying flat on his face. Funny? Now times that by ten because he screamed like a little girl. So I'm sure you can imagine just how hard I was laughing.

I couldn't breathe, let alone open my eyes. Bunny was up and at it after hearing me guffaw. He grabbed me by the scuff of the hood, but I was laughing so hard tears were streaming down my face.

"What the bloody hell was that for, Frostbite?"

"Y-y-y-y-y-yourvoice!" I managed to gasp before falling victim to another fit of laughter.

Surprisingly enough, Bunny's features softened a bit and he let me down. I'd recovered enough to breathe again. Didn't stop me from laughing.

"Right-o mate. You had your fun. Now I suggest you leave me alone before I change my mind and forget about sparing you." He stood up straighter. "I'm going to get some grub."

That made me shut up immediately. "Wait, there's food?"

"Of course." Bunny said it like it was the most obvious thing in the world. "Yetis aren't immortal. They need food. I heard them saying something about pancakes."

That made sense. And I wouldn't say no to good food.

Following Bunny I asked, "So, is it a Pooka thing that you understand Yetiese or something?"

"Actually, they speak ancient Tibetan. The only problem is that their accents are too thick so no one really understands what they're saying. It takes some time. And magic. For whatever reason, all us Guardians understand what they're saying." Bunny shrugged. "I'd try not to think about it too much if I were you, mate."

I nodded and we left it at that. Before long we were all in the captain's quarters eating pancakes.

They were the best pancakes I'd ever had.

Middle of the Night: Somewhere in North Americana (Jack's POV)

I was woken by Sandy. He tugged my sleeve until I was awake, then waved when I did. Like I said some time ago, I usually don't sleep, but today winded me out. Smiling back at Sandy, I sat up and yawned.

"Hey Sandy, wazzup?"

He beckoned all mysterious-like and walked out of my room. Sighing, I grabbed my staff and followed him.

The night air greeted me as it always did: happy and itching to fly. I was about to take off to the east when I remembered what the agreement was. I couldn't leave the ship. I mean, I kinda did in the morning, but I stayed near enough, so I guess that didn't count.

I stayed rooted to the spot. Sandy appeared next to me. Taking my hand he made a cloud of sand materialize under our feet. I was a bit shocked.

"Wait, where are we going? I thought I was on ship arrest!"

He shook his golden head and pointed at himself.

"You mean I'm allowed out with you?"

Got it. Sandy beamed.

"Okay, so what was it you wanted to show me?"

He let go of my hand and flew off. Not wanting to straggle behind, I followed. The great ship vanished in the distance as we soared through the grey clouds. The further we got the more aware I became of my surroundings. I recognized the lights from the sky immediately.

"New Amsterdam?" I asked. "What's here but a few tourists and some lonely businessmen?"

Sandy went past the towering spires of the surrounding skyscrapers to the further slums of the city. I followed him. Shocked, to say the least. I rarely went to that side of the city whenever I visited (which was quite rarely). But I decided not to say anything.

New Amsterdam (Jack's POV)

By the time we stopped weaving through the city I was truly lost. We were by the window of one of the apartments. It was one that I'm sure you all have seen in some cliché movie (or in person; depends who you are). Way too small, dirty, brick, the only window in front of a fire escape by a back alley, laundry lines snaking between the small space between buildings, sneakers hanging from random telephone lines.

Sandy pointed to the window. I hovered close to it before taking a sneaking glance.

There was a couple fighting. They looked to be in their mid- to late twenties. The man was drunk, beating the woman who was shouting curses at the top of his lungs at him. Even she was throwing her fair share of punches at him blindly. Yet that wasn't the worst part.

In the corner was a young boy, no older than eight or nine. Their child. He was skinny, barely above underweight, and wearing clothes at least three sizes too big. What was the worst was the fact that he had a black eye. It was shut and swollen painfully to the point where I wanted to give the poor kid a bag of ice. He sat in his corner, curled up and rocking slightly, his dead eyes slowly drooping into sleep.

I tore my eyes away from the gruesome scene and turned back to Sandy. "What is this? This is terrible! We have to do something!"

I was going to go in when Sandy stopped me. He shook his head slowly in a warning. It hit me then. A Guardian's duties were to guard the children with their centers. Sandy wasn't the Guardian of Safety, he protected dreams. So he couldn't do anything.

Finally, the parents' feud simmered down and they went off to the other places in the apartment. As for their son, he remained in the corner shielded by the ratty couch. It was there that he fell asleep. Slumped against the wall in fear. My stomach turned at the sight of it all.

I kept staring at him until a glowing light stole my attention. I turned around. Sandy's eyes met mine as he held out a ball of bright sand in his little hands. He held it out to me expectantly.

"You're letting me see this dream?"

Sandy nodded. Taking my staff I swept it lightly over the ball. As each dream before had, a picture leapt out towards me and circled the air. But this dream wasn't like most dreams.

It was the boy, but he was a bit older now, about thirteen. He wore clothes that fit and a smile that could light up the world. He wasn't in New Amsterdam, but in a barn eating ice cream with what appeared to be some siblings. It wasn't mythical or anything; in fact, it was one of the simplest dreams I'd ever seen.

To be honest, I was skeptical. "Are you sure that's enough for him?"

Sandy let the dreamsand flow through the crack in the grimy window and embrace the boy. I watched as his features relaxed into calmness. Then he cried. But these tears weren't sad ones. No, they were so happy that it made my immortal ice heart shatter and melt away.

I turned away. This was too much to witness. Who knew something as simple and marvelous as a dream could be so powerful? Just one dream and this would keep the boy going, stop him from curling up into himself and dying.

Sandy rested a steady hand on my shoulder. I didn't need to look up to know his expression was asking me what was wrong. I shook my head slowly.

"I didn't know about kids like this. All my life I feel like I could've done something, anything, to help. But I haven't. How could I have been so blind?" I looked at him hopefully. "Is it too late to try again? Even if I can't be seen, is there a way I could help them through a day? Make them smile?"

Then, surprisingly, Sandy hugged me. I looked up to his pudgy little face. There was a smile and a sparkle in his eyes that gave me the will to carry on. As we flew back to the ship in silence, I felt like I knew exactly what Sandy would've wanted to say to me.

There's always a way.

* * *

><p>Part 2 â€" The Vikings

Berk: The Ramparts (Hiccup's POV)

Group dinners suck. I'm the one that stands out, which is why I usually choose to dine with the company of my shadow. At least it can't speak so it won't judge me openly. I was sitting next to Astrid. After the events of the day, though, I wasn't nearly as thrilled as I usually would've been. I, for the most part, was ignoring her. She ignored me right back.

Gobber was telling the story of how he lost his limbs again. How a dragon bit off his hand, told another dragon he was delicious, and had his leg taken within a month. I knew it by heart, and the story became more extravagant with each retelling, so I drowned him out with my thoughts. Instead I stared at my hand, right where the Night Fury's snout had met my palm. It seemed to tingle at the thought. Astrid seemed to notice my strange demeanor, but chose to ignore it. For once I didn't care. All I could think about was the dragon.

Toothless, I thought. _I'll call him Toothless. _Somehow, I felt he would be alright with the name.

I made small notes about everyone surrounding me; it helps to do that when you're invisible to the world. Everyone was having roast bird, varying in sizes. Astrid's was the smallest, Snotlout's was hefty, the twins were fighting over one bird, and Fish had two. Gobber was in the process of finishing his third.

Strangely enough, I chose to eat fish. It was roasting near the fire. I had yet to take a bite. I'm not sure why, but after meeting Toothless today I was craving fish. Not that I usually eat wild game. I tend to stick to what measly vegetable and grains force their way out of the half-frozen soil. That, or fruit. Believe it or not, there are several types of wild berries that grow around in the woods. I'm the only one who knows which ones are edible or not â€" except for the Elder â€" but most were out of season by then.

Fishlegs dragged my head out of the clouds and back to the wooden deck we were all perched on. "Isn't it cool to think your hand is inside a dragon? What if you still had control of your hand and you could kill it from the inside by crushing its heart or somethingâ€"|"

The thought made me swallow and pushed the fish closer to the fire. Suddenly I wasn't hungry anymore.

Snotlout eyed his bird with a growl. "I swear I'm so angry right now!" He pointed at Gobber and vowed, "I'll avenge your beautiful hand and your beautiful foot. I'll rip them off every dragon I kill with my face."

Wow. Beautiful: that was probably the first time I'd ever heard that adjective used when describing Gobber.

He was preoccupied with ripping one of the wings off his duck. After this, Gobber made a disgruntled noise and spoke a tidbit of expertise. "No. It's the wings and the tail that you want. A downed dragon is a dead dragon."

Everyone else seemed impressed by these words of wisdom except me. The words echoed through my ears hollowly. _A downed dragon is a dead dragon. _

Was that what it was? _A downed dragon is a dead dragon._ Could it be that Toothless would never fly again? Would he really die? Well, he would be at risk without a doubt. Only in the cover of night would he be able to stay hidden. But without his tailfin, he couldn't leave the cove for anything.

What little appetite I had recovered vanished. My stomach had managed to fall away with those words. Reality hit me. So what that I gained the trust of a Night Fury? He couldn't leave. He wasn't free. He was downed. Weak. Vulnerable.

Alone.

And then it hit me hard. Toothless couldn't fly. He couldn't. That's what he was built to do, with his smooth scales and sharp head, and he couldn't do that anymore. It's like saying I couldn't, oh I don't know, draw again. Or run again.

If only I could do something to help him. If only I could

And then an idea hit me. A stupid, ridiculous, impossible idea.

Making sure no one was watching me I left my fish and dashed out down the stairs. Gobber was going on about the initiation ceremony for the best young Viking, but I already knew it wasn't going to be me. There was no point in listening to that. I had work to do.

Berk: The Forge (Hiccup's POV)

The good thing about late night dinners is that the rest of the village is practically asleep. And those who weren't never came near the village center. Which was where the forge was located.

I ran behind the building to the small workshop. I reiterate small. So small it's Hiccup-sized. Gobber helped to build it for me a few years back when I first became his apprentice. Most everything in the room would be considered child-sized for an average Viking, but it was both roomy and cozy for me. Since no one else my size associated

with me, it was my own getaway. And none of the adults who were looking for me could fit anyway.

The workshop had one window and one door; both I kept closed most of the time. The walls were solid wood with stone foundations (of my design) and were covered in designs, sketches, old notes, shelves, and hooks. Journals and charcoal pencils were clammed into various corners of the room. The longest wall (the one not occupied by a window) had a bench built into it. I made myself a stool and used it as a desk.

Thankfully, I kept a lantern lit from earlier when I went to hide the fish I'd given Toothless. Speaking of fish, he'd probably want more tomorrow. I'd have to see about that. Fishing is probably the only thing I've got any competence in that is respectable enough among the village. That and forging.

I went to this desk and pulled out my current notebook. The pencil still marked the last page I'd drawn on. Opening it, I flipped to the sketch. The proud first of a Night Fury.

Taking the pencil, I drew in the tailfin I had erased the other day. Then I opened to a new page and began to design. It took a bit of thought, but surprisingly little.

In the end it didn't look too complicated, just a few rays from a central bar (the tail), but I'd need to make that myself. It would need to be quite flexible too. Then the fin itself would need to be sturdy. Waterproof. If only there was something fireproof too, but that didn't seem likely unless I made the whole thing metal, and by then it would be too heavy for that. Leather, perhaps? There was always leather in the village. I had several skins of it in my workshop somewhere. Yes, this could work!

Then a little voice in the back of my mind began to ask the questions. Why even bother? Doing this would only worsen my chances with the village. Helping a dragon wouldn't bring me any glory. And what of Toothless once he had a tail? Wouldn't he just leave me? And what if it didn't work? What then? What good would any of this bring either of us?

I stared down at my palm and clenched my hand into a fist. No! I was determined to do whatever it took for Toothless. Even if it meant forsaking the Viking way.

Taking the notebook I went to the forge. All the fires were out; good, that meant everyone had gone to bed. Making sure no one was watching, I slipped into the building and closed the service area.

In the back of the Forgery is a place Gobber and I dubbed 'the scrap pile.' It housed just about any bit, chunk, or weak metal that we had no use for. Sometimes old swords and bolts were stacked on too. This included what I'd been able to salvage from my catapult at the last raid. Though it was destroyed beyond repair, there was a good coil of old wire and several good bolts attached to the wood.

I retrieved the parts and set them aside. There were also a few other contraptions I'd tinkered with; I knew they'd be where I left them. With a grunt I yanked out a modified pair of wings " my first

adventure. It resulted in me losing about six teeth with the horrible crash I took from jumping off the roof. But I was only nine then and all kids probably wished they could fly as free as a dragon someday.

Several other thin beams and clasps came out. After being buried twice by the mountain of junk, I slipped out and began working.

Lighting the great forge, I pulled the bellows until the fires came. I started by melting down a few rusty swords. I knew no one would miss those. They were a weaker alloy and heated up quickly. Taking the red-hot metal, I brought it with tongs to the work station and folded it down. After pounding, I stuck it into a bucket of water and repeated the process.

It was comforting to work again. Though it'd been less than a week, I felt as though more time than necessary had passed. I fell into the calming motions, by body going into a mechanical reflex system. The heat of the flames and the hiss of the water were oddly relaxing.

Before long I was hot and sweaty with all the beams made. The bolts were much easier. All they needed were to be flattened and modified. The screws were reusable.

I weighed each one carefully, making notes in my book. I took measurements of all the items, their dimensions, everything I could think of. Once everything was in place I unraveled a roll of leather. Surprisingly, that part took the longest. In the end, I was able to slide the "rays" of the tailfin into the columns I stitched and closed them off. Satisfied they were all sturdy, I opened and shut it a few times.

Perfect.

Closing it for one last time, I wrapped it in an old blanket to hide it from suspicion and brought it with me back to the house. The sun was beginning to peak over the horizon, but I was too tired to care. Dragging myself through the front door (which had finally been replaced) I dropped everything and collapsed on the floor.

Looks like all-nighters were a really bad idea.

My last thought before I blacked out was that I'd forgotten to clean up the forge. At least I had my notebook secured in my vest pocket; that would be one less thing to explain.

Berk: The Sea (Hiccup's POV)

The only thing I can do that isn't feminine is fish. I'd probably give the title of chief to Snotlout and become a fisherman if I knew Dad would be dead-set against it. The good thing about Berk is that there is an abundance of fish and it's never suspicious for someone to be out with a pole and a net. Even me.

I told a few of the people on the dock that I was smoking extra that night for winter storage. They let me go without a care, even though I was alone with a giant basket in my arms. I took the smallest rowboat and went out to where the waves became less choppy. A good

thing about being a Viking is that the sea is like a second home.

I eased on the oars and pulled out a line and bait. Our oceans were rich; I'd have no problems.

I didn't. After an hour, my basket was filled to the brim and I was heading back inland. Classes wouldn't be held until the afternoon so I had the rest of the morning to myself. I smiled. It was time to test out a night's hard work.

Berk: The Cove (Hiccup's POV)

"Hey Toothless!" I called as I snuck into the cove. Thank the gods I got there in once piece. It was nearly impossible to get out of the village with a heavy basket of fresh fish. Plus, Fishlegs kept saying there was something he wanted to show me in the archives later that afternoon. It was a nearly-impossible task to shake him off. Plus, the tailfin was weighing my arms down too.

"Toothless?"

There it was again: that presence I felt yesterday after touching his snout. I wasn't sure what it was, but somehow I knew it was Toothless. Turning around, I wasn't surprised to see him slinking out of the shadows. In fact, I was quite glad I did.

"Morning bud!"

He cooed. Toothless's attention went from me to the basket I had. I didn't notice.

"Toothless. You're okay with me calling you that, right?"

He rolled his eyes as if to say, "Whatever," and continued to eye the basket I had slung over my shoulder. I dropped it on the ground with a slight splat. Then I kicked it onto its side so all the fish inside slid out to be seen.

"I hope you're hungry!" I said enthusiastically. _Because it took me forever to carry it! _I thought. "I wasn't really sure what dragons eat, but you seemed to like fish, so I went fishing. There's some good salmon, mostly Icelandic cod though, oh! And a whole smoked eel."

The eel I added for flair. Bad idea. Toothless was digging through the basket's contents when he came across the eel. A strange clicking sound was emitted from the back of his throat upon spotting it. Interesting; I'd have to make note of that. To be sure, I picked it up.

Toothless's entire body contorted in fear. His nostrils flared, eyes turned to slits, teeth barred, and wings spread as he hissed loudly.

It scared me. "No no no no no!" I shouted, tossing the thing aside. "It's okay."

He snorted disgustedly at my hand. I wiped it on my vest. "Yeah, I don't really like them much either." That was the truth.

Toothless relaxed and began to eat to his heart's content. Seeing he was completely occupied I snuck behind him with the bundle in my arms. "Okay, just don't mind me back here. I'm just gonna clip this onâ€¦"

He was ignoring me. Kneeling next to his tail, I was about to strap the fin on when he moved away from me. I followed when his real fin threatened to hit me in the face.

"Woah, buddy! Calm down. It's okay!"

I took a firm hold of the tail. And I was pulled forward as Toothless stuck his head into the basket, looking for more breakfast. Wow, he must've been hungry! Seeing my chance, I turned so my back was to him. Sitting on the tail I took the makeshift fin and began to strap it on.

Berk: The Cove (Toothless's POV)

It was good to finally have a filling meal again. I sighed in content. Yet any good dragon knows that more food is better. Aside from the fright with that awful demon sea serpent, my fish was quite enjoyable. I wasn't one to eat much fish in the first place, but it was indeed tasty. Satisfying.

There wasn't much though; at least, not enough for a starving dragon as myself. I checked the woven basin the boy brought with him, but there wasn't any more. Typical humans.

Still, I couldn't hate him, thisâ€¦Hiccup. Yes, that was his name. Hiccup. He was the only human I'd ever met who had shown me such kindness. He was also the only one to have managed to shoot me down. And disable me. Yes, I knew it was him. His scent was all over the ropes. I recognized them as his immediately when he freed me.

That still confuses me. I thought about it for quite some time, but still could not manage an answer. Why did he free me? He had every chance to get rid of me, but he didn't. Why?

As for Hiccup, he was fiddling around with my tail. Was it really that fascinating after losing a fin I wonder? I could feel, as well as hear, Hiccup tie something onto it. What in sky's name was it?

I wiggled my tail a little. Judging by where I felt the weight, it was right where my missing fin was. And then I realized what the mysterious item was. My mouth hung wide open from a flood of emotions. He didn't! I heard a rumor that humans obtained their power from creating, due to their lack of natural defenses, but to create a fin?

My body was itching to fly. Like any unconscious emotion, my wings spread open for flight. It was not or never.

Berk: The Cove (Hiccup's POV)

Thankfully, the size looked to be a good estimate. But I would take thorough measurements later. I admired my handiwork.

"Well, it's not too bad. I'll need to find a way to keep it open though."

The next thing I knew, I was screaming as the ground left from beneath me. Oh gods, we were flying. Or more specifically, Toothless was flying as I was clinging onto his tail for dear life. It was then when I noticed the fin wasn't open. It flapped worthlessly at his tail's side.

I could feel the flight beginning to tilt to one side. Taking my invention I pulled it open with a grunt. Toothless shot straight up to a dizzying height. We were just below the puffy white clouds. Trees were the size of fingers, the cove nothing more than a bowl of water.

It was exhilarating.

"Oh my â€" i-it works!"

I tilted the tailfin so Toothless curved down gracefully to the lake over the cove. I was still celebrating from the success.

"Yes! It works!"

I sensed some annoyance. The next thing I knew I was being flung into the lake. I bounced a few times until I finally was submerged. Thankfully, I could swim. Surfacing, I saw that Toothless was on the other side of the lake. He looked annoyed. I was too happy.

Throwing both arms in the air, I jumped. "Woo!"

* * *

><p>Sorry I rushed through this part a bit. Didn't even consider editing it!

More Sandy and Jack friendship. So magical. It was really hard to write (maybe 'cause I'm one of those clichÃ© people Jack was talking about~). And question: how could I make it more obvious Toothless is talking? Is there something I could possibly use instead of quotation marks? Just for future reference, because I don't want to end up putting everything he says in italics.

I've finally started the next chapter. The first fight scene is right around the corner, for those wondering what's coming up. With school and stuff, I'll do my best to keep up with regular weekly updates. I'm shooting for finishing up each weekend starting next week, but we'll see, eh?

-Sushi

_P.S. Before I forget: a big thank you to all favs, fans, and reviews. They really keep me going! _

\(^J^)/ _(a happy Russia for you~)_

7. The Power of Fear

Hey guys! I feel like such a winner; updated this chapter already after starting it on Thursday! And it's my longest chapter yet, over 11,600 words! Lots happens, I guess.

_Nothing to add. Read and enjoy. And as always, leave a happy comment in the magical box at the bottom of this page; I love feedback! As tribute, I would like to give a shout-out to __**QuirkyRevelations, Kanamizaki, lukerlaine, Rowena BaronErikandSnapelover, .craze, Yoshi-Strange, XCagedHopeX, AngelOfTheTwilight, **__and__** Melidona **__for reviewing, plus the guests __**Guest, Somebody, **__ and __**hello**__! I'm sure the three counted as "Guest" can be different people, but I'll just put it as one. And __**TsukinArchangel **__for the idea. And everyone who is still reading. And those who just stumbled across it. You guys are way awesome! Especially you **QuirkyRevelations**!_

_EDIT: ___Big thank you to guest reviewer Sadie who pointed out that I accidentally forgot to give credit to the artist of the song "Something Different." I used / *ahem, stole* a lot of the lines from said song for Jack's dialogue this chapter, and wanted to say that **I don't own her brilliant work**. Anyone who doesn't know the song should totally check it out on YouTube. Again, I own nothing! (Thanks Sadie; you're right - I should've given her credit for that!)_

* * *

><p>7 â€" The Power of Fear

* * *

><p>Part I â€" The Guardians

The Aurora Borealis: Somewhere Over the Ocean (Jack's POV)

"And this isâ€|Prancer?"

"Comet," North corrected.

"Right. Sorry Comet."

The reindeer snorted into my hair, blowing it into my eyes. I laughed.

I was in the reindeer pens. North was there to feed them, and I just happened to be freezing their water troughs over. Thankfully, the Russki has a good sense of humor, so I wasn't harmed. Instead I ended up defrosting the water and trying my best to name the creatures. So far, I'd only gotten Blitzen right. And that was a random guess.

As I patted his head, I asked, "So I'm guessing Rudolph doesn't really exist, does he?"

"No," North said, "he does. But I usually leave him home. He is only for special occasion, like foggy skies."

"Right." As if I understood.

North, again, didn't comprehend my sarcasm. Instead he hoisted up a bucket of oats he was carrying and began hand-feeding them. "Would you like to help me? It will go faster with two hands."

I shrugged and leaned my staff against the wall. I cupped my hands out to him. North poured a generous amount of oats into them. A

reindeer's muzzle (I think it was Donner, but I really had no idea) was against my icy flesh in moments, devouring everything. It tickled and I found myself chuckling under my breath. North watched me for a while, then laughed as well.

The whole day somehow ended up passing like this. Relaxing. It wasn't winter yet anywhere in the world, so having less frost wasn't really affecting anyone. Well, except everyone on the ship. I'll spare you all the fluffy details, but I found myself surrounded with peace. Away from my own thoughts.

After feeding the reindeer, I ran into Tooth. Half an hour later, I was making her a pirate hat while she made warmer clothes for up in Berk. The pirate hat wasn't a challenge; before long, I set it down and was working on a winter hat, a light blue thing lined with white fur. Ends up I had a knack for stitching.

"Where in the world did you learn to sew, Jack?" she asked.

I looked down at the completed hat in my hands. "I honestly have no idea. I've just been able to do it for as long as I can remember. It's a natural thing. Who knows, maybe I was a seamstress's son or something?"

"Maybe!" Tooth put the finishing touches to her outfit. "Here, get out so I can change!"

"Ya sure you don't want me around?"

She laughed. "Your sarcasm only works on North silly!"

I gave her my most 'innocent' puppy-dog eyes. "What? Sarcastic? Me? No way. You must be mistaken Toothiana! How could I be sarcastic to you?"

"Out!"

She slammed the door in my face, but I could hear her giggling from behind it. Smiling, I leaned on the wall opposite from it.

I heard muffled footsteps coming down the hall. Turning to my left, I saw Bunny leaving his room and coming towards me. I waved.

"Morning, Bunny."

"Frostbite." He scanned the floor to make sure I didn't freeze it "which I didn't" and asked, "Is there a reason you're standin' in fronta Tooth's room like a creeper."

"Is it a criminal offence?" I asked back innocently.

He scoffed. "It could be."

"I'll make a bet it isn't."

"Wanna bet?" Bunny slipped a boomerang easily from his back strap. "Or ya too scared to try?"

I was about to say "You're on!" when I realized I didn't have my staff in my hand. Oh crap; I snuck a glance at the closed door. Yep,

without a doubt, I left it in there with Tooth. Who was probably half-naked. And what guy would walk in when a female friend was changing without her expressed permission?

Bunny noticed my hesitation. "What is it Frost, are ya really too afraid to fight?"

"Not in your lifetime, Kangaroo." But I was still trying to make a show with no actions. I didn't have any abilities without my staff.

He smirked. "Well then, get ready to taste the power of a Pooka, mate!"

He was about to throw a punch " and I had just held my hands up in a defensive position " when the door flew open. We both stopped out less-than-playful banter and turned.

Toothiana stood before us with a smile that could blind the sun brightening her face. Her blond hair floated out from under the hat I'd just completed. She was wearing a long coat that reached halfway down her shins and matching boots. The coat and hat were a sky blue; silver, navy blue, and gold stitchings wove over them with intricate swirls of snowflakes, and lined with fur. Her boots were tough brown leather. The pants were loosely fit and cream. It was a perfect fit " curving into her waist and flaring out, but still showing how proportionally thin she really was.

Tooth did a little spin. I noticed she had made slits in the backs to accommodate her wings. "Tada!"

Bunny whistled lowly and I nodded.

"_D;D½DµD³ÑfÑ€D¾Ñ†D°D°_, " I whispered.

"Snegoo-what?" asked Bunny.

"_D;D½DµD³ÑfÑ€D¾Ñ†D°D°_, " I repeated. "The Snow Maiden in Rossia. She's known as North's granddaughter, a fictional character from his homeland. At least, I've never met her if she exists. It's said that she's blond and beautiful, and wears exactly that." I pointed at Tooth. "If there were a _D;D½DµD³ÑfÑ€D¾Ñ†D°D°_, I would bet she looks just like you."

"Aw Jack!" Tooth fluttered up and dove into my arms. "You're too kind! There's no way I'm that ethereal! Besides, you made the hat."

I just shrugged and blushed. It was pinkish at first, but my skin flushed my cheeks blue after a moment. Once Tooth pulled away, I had an idea. Running into the room, I retrieved my staff from the floor. The familiar cool touch of the wood sent a spark of power through my body. Frost began to weave through the crevices on its surface.

I motioned for her to follow. Both Bunny and Tooth did. We went up on the deck where I began to make it snow gently around Tooth. Not much; I didn't want her wings to get too buffeted. But it was enough to give a winter appearance around her.

"There. Now you truly are a winter fairy."

Tooth flew up into the isolated cloud of snow with a whoop worthy of my own carefree spirit. While she was in the air, Bunny hopped over to me. Even he seemed impressed.

"When d'ya learn Russkian?" he asked.

I shrugged. "I'm not sure. Sainkt Peterburg is my favorite city. I've been flying there practically all my life, so I've become pretty fluent in Russkian over the years I guess."

He nodded. "That's pretty goodâ€¦I guess."

I mock-gasped and clutched a hand over my heart. "What is this? Have my ears deceived me or did the Kangaroo just give me a compliment? Oh my, the heavens have opened and shined on his poor little soul!"

He cuffed me across the head. "Quiet, you!"

North came down then, Sandy behind him. Baby Tooth fluttered from her perch on Sandy's shoulder to mine. I stroked her feathery cheek with a finger.

The big man waved to us. "We're docking now. Eat lunch and continue trip in an hour, yes?"

Come to think of it, North did all of the ship-steering, didn't he? That must take hours of work. He only took breaks when Phil or Andy would take over. As for Sandy, he was barely on the ship to allow for relaxation time. Whenever he was I usually caught him snoozing off by his room. Right in front of the door too. Never in it though. Wake him and he'll float in real secret-like.

The three of us gathered by them. I stopped the falling snow. "I didn't know we had an anchor."

"Every ship has anchor, Jack," North said matter-of-factly. "It is one of five rules of sky sailing."

"What rules?"

"One: Never sail higher than longest anchor. Two: Never fly through uncharted skies. Three: Always know the condition of the ship. Four: Always have plenty of supplies. But it is Rule Five that is most important."

"What's rule number five?"

North gave me a kindly look. "Five. Always put the welfare of the crew before your own. Always look at each member as family. Always respect them. And most of all, no matter what, always do everything in your power to help them through thick and thin. Love them as much as you could ever love a person."

By then, everyone was there: North, Tooth, Baby, Sandy, Bunny, Phil, Andy, Robb, Gerald, Maddie, Henrietta. And me: Jack Frost.

The next thing I knew, we were all in a big group hug. Uncomfortable on so many levels, but I think I could get used to it.

After that, we had lunch. Borscht, to be specific. Who knew yetis ate daintily! Much more than I did, that's for sure. I've probably got beet stains on my fingers for years to come! But sitting there, laughing with everyone, I felt something I can't remember ever feeling before.

I felt at home.

Over Eastern Canadia (Jack's POV)

It seemed as though I was allowed off the ship as long as I was accompanied by another Guardian. Not surprised; if there's anyone who needs a babysitter, it's me. But today Sandy was working nearby, so I went off with him. I had North's consent too, before he vanished to his room. I suspected there was a portal there back to Santoff Claussen so he could still keep up with his Christmas planning duties.

We were near the southeast border of Canadia by an ocean town. While Sandy did his dream magic, I flew through the mild waves by the sea. They would freeze as I passed through, but melt immediately when I was gone. I was having a good time to say the least. The fish around there, not so much.

Finally getting tired of my antics I rushed back to the town. Skating down a telephone wire, I sprinted and took bounding leaps with my hand outstretched, laughing as it made contact with various tendrils of dream sand. Images flew out and glowed before my eyes, all sorts of wonders to behold.

I could honestly get used to this.

I glided up to the platform Sandy had in the air. Because this town was smaller, he was able to send all the dreams from one spot. When I got there, he was finishing up.

"Good night?" I asked.

He smiled and nodded. We watched the last of the dreams make their way to a large apartment complex. I turned towards Sandy's happy face.

"You never get tired of this, do you?"

He shook his head.

I was about to take off on that happy note when Sandy grabbed my sleeve. "What is it?"

Sandy pointed towards the last of his dreams. I was about to ask what was wrong when I saw it too. A shadow flew through them, scattering the sand from its intended path. That seemed concerning.

I looked down at Sandy. I'll say his face was quite terrifying. He was seething with anger. No one messes with his dreams, I guess. I tapped him on the shoulder lightly. "Umâ€|Sandy? You okay?"

Sandy brushed off my hand sharply and flew down to the scene at a speed that would rival mine. I followed close behind. I'd never seen the Sandman angry; somehow, I saw it a situation that could easily

become fun.

When we arrived on the scene, Sandy's anger increased by tenfold if possible. There seemed to be a dark cloud of rage surrounding him. The aura itself was menacing. I looked down at the sand by our feet.

It was pitch black.

"What is it?" I asked, but the question became redundant very quickly. The black sand began to writhe, forming the shape of a great black horse, red-eyed and ominous. I gasped. "That's not a happy dream, is it?"

"Recognize this, Sandman?"

We turned around to the voice. My suspicions were confirmed. Not that I had any suspicions, but whom else could it be?

"Pitch Black," I growled.

"Frost." His tone was disdainful. "It's been a while now, hasn't it? Since we've had a descent chat, I mean."

I rolled my eyes. "Enough of the small talk, Pitch. What the hell is that?"

"That?" He eyed his creation. "Oh, that! Why that is a little something I like to call a nightmare. They used to be so effective, until the Sandman here found out and reversed the effects. I tried to make an army of nightmares once, all out of tainted dream sand. I almost succeeded too, until the other Guardians decided to intervene."

Sandy placed a hand on the horse. It immediately transformed back into a unicorn and trotted off. With his threat gone, Sandy turned on Pitch with angry eyes.

Pitch mock-gasped. "What is this? Surely you can't be upset with me, Sandman? After all, I haven't been using it on children anymore. At least, not very many children."

I stepped forward. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"You want to know? Well then, I suggest you find where these creatures came from."

I heard the sound of wings beating. Turning, I saw a hoard of dragons flying towards us. They looked vicious, eyes bloodshot and teeth barred. I decided upon instinct what to do.

I nudged Sandy. "Split. We'll take 'em out one by one!"

He nodded. From the sand materialized two golden whips. He cracked them threateningly and flew right. I went left, the wind picking up behind me.

Flames were shooting left and right, from all angles in all actuality. I flew backwards so I could blast the fire with my staff. Fire doesn't kill me, but it's got a certain burn to it I don't

appreciate. I've never been completely engulfed for any extended period of time. I bet I'd be in excruciating pain or something dramatic like that.

As the buildings around me became charred, I couldn't help but think about the cost for repair. I tried my best to put out the majority of the fire. Damage would remain yet it would be minimal.

After a minute of flying, I managed to nail one straight in the wing. It crashed onto a nearby roof. I laughed. In fact, I probably hadn't stopped laughing since splitting with Sandy. "Ha ha! Sandy! Sandy, did ya see that? Wow, look at this thing!"

Flying over to the dragon I took a long look. Its wing was plastered to its body where the ice was, but I could see it was melting. The thing was less terrifying now that it was lying there helpless. It had small wings despite its large, bulky body " which resembled a large, brown boulder. The dragon was no longer growling. Instead, it struggled quietly while watching me with petrified eyes.

I poked it with my staff. The ice refroze before immediately beginning to defrost again. The dragon seemed more scared than ever. Feeling guilty, I tried to comfort it. "Hey, shh, it's okay. I'm not gonna hurt you. Okay?"

"Frost."

I gasped and turned around. There was Pitch Black, walking easily out of the shadows. I made a swipe from him, but he vanished as he usually did. I wheeled around as his voice came from behind me.

"I've noticed you've been spending an awful lot of time with those Guardians." He spat the word like poison. "This isn't your fight, Jack. It's theirs."

"You made it my fight when you stole those teeth," I retaliated.

"Teeth?" he asked. "Why do you care about the teeth?"

Suddenly, we both sensed a presence. Standing silently behind Pitch was the Sandman. Pitch gasped and danced away from Sandy's tiny frame, who was still obviously furious. After he regained his composure, the Boogeyman began to laugh nervously.

"Now this was who I was looking for. Hello Sandman."

Sandy's arms uncrossed and his whips reappeared in one fluid movement. He proceeded to lash at Pitch without a hitch in his step. I wanted to intervene, but it was too fast for me to follow. The two whips cracked and twirled in twin golden arcs while Pitch barely managed to dodge them. Each narrowly missed him.

Then one snagged around his wrist. Pitch only had a moment to comprehend it until he was being flung into the sky, the walls, banged against the concrete and flung down the street, triggering several car alarms.

I gave Sandy a low whistle. "Remind me not to get on your bad

side."

The two of us floated down to the road where Pitch was getting up from the road. He scrambled back when we came.

"Okay, I'm sorry," Pitch begged as we approached. "You can't blame me for trying! You don't know what it's like to be weak and hated. It was stupid of me. I should have learned after the first time to never mess with your dream. So I'll tell you whatâ€¦" His face changed from pitiful to evil, "You can have them all back."

Black sand began to float through the air. It swirled around the dragons that were there. Was he controlling them through nightmares? It seemed so; the dragons resisted for a moment before a strange glint came to their eyes and they surrounded me and Sandy.

I took a quick head count. We were outnumbered at least fifty to one. I stood back-to-back with Sandy and swallowed. "You take the ones on the left, I take the ones on the right?"

He shrugged.

Pitch's eyes became wide. He said one simple word. "Boo."

All hell broke loose.

Sandy's whips reappeared as he lashed out. I gripped my staff and got ready to attack. Just then, the sound of bells filled the air. The fight paused momentarily as we all looked up the sky. North had the reigns in his hands, the reindeer practically roaring as they trampled through. The sleigh came barreling down the street, scattering the dragons, before the fight migrated back to the sky.

Sandy grabbed me by the waist and used the distraction to fly us into the sky on a flat platform of sand. We went up into the greying clouds with a spiral of dragons following us. When we made good height, Sandy let go of me so I could fight on my own.

I shot a flash of frost at the nearest dragon. It fell to the sky with a shriek. I didn't hit it with much, just enough to stop them. Since it seemed as though they were out of their spell as soon as they were attacked the dragons would fly back north.

Tooth came up next to me. "Jack!"

"Tooth!" I flew over to her. "How did you guys know to come here?"

"We saw the dragons flying this way and came to investigate." She ducked as a dragon came flying by. "Is there anything I should know about them?"

I pointed to the black sand surrounding them. "Pitch is controlling them with some tainted dream sand. Once you destroy that, they fly away without bothering to attack."

"Destroy the sand. On it!" She winged away and blasted through at least six dragons in one circle. Wow, those wings were lethal!

Bunny leapt from the sleigh onto a roof. His boomerangs spun through the sky like nobody's business. Taking out a dozen dragons he jumped back onto the sleigh. North allowed the controls back to his reindeer. He gave a surprisingly threatening yet jolly laugh as he cut through the nightmare-cloaked dragons. As for Sandy, he was whipping a circle of dragons from his golden platform.

I was in the midst of dodging two dragons when I felt someone grab me from the back of my hood. I was tossed non-too-gently onto the back of a dragon. And sitting on the dragon next to me was Pitch. He was checking his nails in a very bored manner.

"I felt we should talk."

"Okay, talk," I said.

"You're probably wondering why I keep interfering with the duties of the Guardians. I wanted to let you know that it's not because I hate the children or anything. In fact, it's because they have no way of understanding how I feel."

"That's stupid." It came out pretty fast. Pitch's eyes narrowed.

"Stupid? Really? As if you're no different from me. You're the only one that understands, which is why I'm telling you what I've been doing in Berk for the last three hundred years."

That got my attention. "Three hundred years?"

"Are you interested? I could tell youâ€¦but firstâ€¦"

"What is it?"

"A child's mind is so delicate and fragile, after all," Pitch said smoothly, changing topics faster than you could say 'Jack Frost'. "It's no wonder they're more susceptible to the power of fear. Nothing like an adult, of course. It's why the precious Guardians protect them."

"What have you been doing to the kids?"

"And why should I tell you, Jack?"

I clenched my staff tightly with anger coursing through my icy veins. The way he brushed it off made me on edge. He was definitely plotting something and I didn't like it. I took a swipe at him, only to have Pitch vanish and rematerialize on another nearby dragon.

"Temper temper." He tsked. "Now now Jack, we mustn't let out emotions get out of hand. Relax. Let me tell you a little story. Once upon a time, I tried to do something no one had ever accomplished before."

I really wasn't liking his grin. "And what was that?"

"I tried to kill a Guardian." Pitch shrugged. "I should have realized that it was impossible. You can influence their ability, so to speak, but they can never die. The Man in the Moon makes them immortal and immune to regular deaths â€" even if they are no longer believed in,

they are only weakened. But that weakness is what makes them defeatable.

"Fear can take all forms. It can make one agreeable. It manipulates them. The Guardians would be lying if they told you they weren't afraid. They must live in constant fear, bound by rules and duties and a reason no one can put in words.

"It's the Fear that keeps these dragons bound to me." He stroked the head of the nearest one. "What do you think? A fearsome creature loyal to me. Too afraid to leave the company of either me or its Queen."

"Queen?" I asked.

He didn't reply. Instead his grin became more gruesome. Pitch flew off his dragon easily; I followed.

"The problem with the Queen is that she hates winter. She is a beast of fire and ash, not of cold and storms. Yet I convinced her to accommodate you. She is quite thoughtful. Willing to set aside her hatred for the greater good. I could show you, Jack, all the power that comes with this."

I shook my head. "I don't think so. Just tell me what you needed the teeth for, Pitch."

"I willâ€¦but there's a catch."

"Oh?"

"You have to come with me. And in return, I'll tell you everything. I'll even let you have these." And then he held up my teeth tauntingly in front of me. I was about to reach out for them when I stopped myself.

I couldn't break the trust of the crew now.

I put my hand back in my hoodie pocket. "Sorry Pitch, but I'm afraid I can't. That's breaking the ship's most important rule."

Pitch had me by the front of my hoodie. His yellow eyes stared into mine.

"You could always come with me Jack," he murmured. "We go together, cold and dark. Ice and shadows. We would make a powerful team, you and I. We would be believed in. Seen. Have you not always wished for that?"

I remained silent.

"So be it." Pitch leaned in close to my ear. He whispered, "Did you honestly think I'd let you all go freely to Berk?"

I didn't realize the shadow dagger materialize in his hand until his arm came back. It flashed menacingly in the moonlight. Unable to move, I closed my eyes and braced myself for impactâ€¦

â€¦only nothing came.

I opened my eyes slowly, and gasped. Floating between me and Pitch was Sandy. His eyes were hard and determined, stance brave and strong.

Embedded in his back was the dagger.

It disintegrated slowly and was carried off into the night. Sandy coughed silently, his body wracked with pain. And then I watched with a horrified fascination as the wound on his back blossomed black. The shadows spread up his back and over his shoulders.

I watched and realized what exactly Pitch meant by influencing a Guardian's powers.

"No!" I reached out.

Pitch laughed cruelly. "I'd say sweet dreams, but it looks like there aren't any left."

A dragon swept by, knocking my staff out of my hand. Pitch let go of me so I was falling, but I couldn't stop. Not without my staff. I forced myself to turn away from the awful scene, reaching for the wooden shepherd's crook that was spiraling down through the sky. It went through a cloud, and I shot down after it.

"Sandy!"

I was able to grab my staff and landed on the one of the wings of North's sleigh. Looking over, I met eyes with Bunnymund. All he said was, "Ya might wanna duck."

I did. His boomerang came flying into his open hand a second later. Once he truly looked at me Bunny did sense my immediate panic. He frowned.

"What's happened, Frostbite?"

"We have to get to Sandy!"

Not bothering to wait for his reply I flew straight up with the strength of the wind. I could hear North cracking the reins furiously, calling for me to hurry as another sea of dragons affronted the sleigh. But we were all too late.

Sandy stared down at his hands as they became tainted by darkness. It was spreading faster now, several smaller marks blotching their way across his chest like fire burning paper. As all the sand turned black, the Sandman's eyes met mine for one last time. He smiled. Though he smiled, I could sense the defiance in them. The true warrior on the inside. He turned towards Pitch and closed his eyes with an unwavering scowl.

And then he vanished.

"No!"

I can't say exactly what happened next. In all honesty, I'm not sure. All I remember in clear memory was my anger. It burned like liquid nitrogen through my veins. The wind roared in my ears as I let out an anguished cry and flew forward faster than I'd ever managed in my

life.

Pitch had the black sand swirling around him, in his control. As I rocketed towards him he shot it all at me. I held my staff out in attack mode.

The sound barrier seemed to explode with out impacting forces. At first the sand swept me back; I even stopped as it came towards me. Then something inside me broke. I ripped through the sky, everything howling around me, and fired all of my anger out with a shriek.

All the sand surrounding me froze. In fact, anything within a ten foot radius did. Black sand, dragon fire, rushing blood, screaming wind, everything. All I heard was my voice rising above all, every emotion possible crammed into it.

Then the ice exploded.

Both from the sudden outward blast and my complete loss of energy made me fly backwards. My vision started going black around the corners. I knew I was falling, but it felt like going through molasses: slow and thick.

The next thing I knew, Tooth was carrying me gently down to the sleigh. She set me down on a seat. I tried to sit up, and failed. Groaning, I flopped back down again.

"Jack?"

I forced one of my eyes open a crack. Tooth and Bunny were both staring over my, concern riddled on their faces. Especially Tooth; her violet eyes were practically brimming with tears.

"Jack?" she repeated. "Oh, thank the moon you're alright! I was so worried. You just fell and we weren't sure if Pitch managed to hit you!"

Finally having enough energy to sit up, I propped myself up with an elbow. "I'm okay. Where's Pitch."

"Gone. Left as soon as ya did that li'l trick of yours." Bunny helped me up. His paw was uncomfortably warm, but I didn't bat it away. Once I was in a normal sitting position I used my staff as a makeshift cane. The Pooka let go of me. "Bloody hell, mate. How did you do that? Where did that power come from?"

"I don't know." It felt lame to say, but that's all I could muster. "I don't know."

The Aurora Borealis: Somewhere Over the Ocean (Jack's POV)_

North, Bunnymund, and Tooth stood around a portrait in the Sandy's cabin. I opted for standing in the doorway. It was the first time any one of us had been it. Everything there was still golden. The last bit of pure dream sand caked the floor in a soft warmth that I didn't want my icy feet to taint. In the center, under a rug, was a painting. Much like the one Tooth had under her palace, though this one depicted the outline of the Sandman in a circle.

Somehow, it seemed to become tarnished before our eyes.

I left. The sight of them grieving their longtime friend was too painful for me. I'd always been talking to Sandy throughout the ages, but never as close as the last few days. I felt like I'd just had my heart ripped out of my chest and crushed into a million pieces. It wasn't right.

Pulling my hood over my head, I ran outside to the head of the ship, sat next to the angel. She had her arms raised to the horizon. Unconsciously, I took my staff and made icy tears run down her face. The sun made it melt slowly so it actually looked like she was really crying.

I heard footsteps approaching. Looking up, I saw North coming over to me. He sat down by me, watching. I sighed and snuck a glance at him from under the shade of my hood.

"Why did he have to go?" I finally asked.

"It is risk we all chose to take. We all have our own path to follow. Our friend chose to save you. It was path he chose with his own free will."

I remained silent. Then I looked up at him. "Why would he do that for me? Why not just leave me to my own fate?"

"It's because you still have much to find. Many questions to answer. Sandy wanted you to find them, because it was your dream. And it will be the key to your center."

"Even by putting the faith of the children on the line?"

"Even so."

"He shouldn't have. Kids need his dreams." I thought back to the boy in the slums of New Amsterdam. "No one needs me when I can't be seen. They needed the Sandman. Now all they'll have are nightmares. That's not fair to them."

"Never doubt power of children. They may not have physical strength, but the fire in their hearts is nothing to look down on." North's baby blue eyes met mine. "Sandy would not have wanted us to grieve. Everything will be okay! I can feel itâ€¦in my belly!"

I looked up. "Thanks North."

He patted my shoulder gently. "If you ever need to talk, we all are here for you Jack. Don't forget that."

I nodded. Excusing myself, I went downstairs to my room. Phil happened to be passing by with a tray of cocoa and hot apple cider. I crashed into him, almost spilling everything. He looked ready to spit fire at me, but stopped when he saw I wasn't getting up off the floor.

Phil set down the tray and offered me a clawed hand. I took it and he pulled me up gingerly. He even brushed me off, but it was quite harsh considering he had all his yeti power in him. Phil tapped my head until I looked up into his chocolate brown eyes. They asked the question no one seemed to want to utter.

"I'm alright. Or at least I will be."

Phil nodded. He handed me a single mug from the tray. It burned when my hands first made contact with it, but then it froze over.

"Hot-cold chocolate? Can that be a thing?"

The yeti shrugged and went off on his way. As did I. My room wasn't too far. I entered and shut the door behind me, wishing for once that there was a lock.

Thankfully no one came down to bother me. I drank my hot-cold chocolate in slow sips throughout the day. I lay there, on my bed, and watched from the pothole as the moon rose and fell. And again. And again. North, Tooth, Baby, even Phil, visited periodically. Henrietta and Gerard (who I later learned were married and co-operators of the kitchen on the ship) would bring me food. I ate it, but tasted nothing.

It was that morning that there was a light knock on my door.

"Leave me alone, North," I grumbled. "Or Tooth, if it's you. Or you, Phil, Henrietta, or Gerard. I'll bring my dishes back down to the kitchen if you want me to."

Bunny popped his head in. "Not likely, mate, considering I'm not that Christmas celebrator. Or a woman. Or a yeti for that matter."

"Lemme rephrase. Get out, Easter Kangaroo."

"No." he hopped over to me. "Something's on your mind, Frostbite. Even I can tell. It's been three days mate. And I hate to say it, but I'm just as worried as the next person for your sanity." He added gently, "What happened that night wasn't your fault."

"North already said that," I said quietly.

Bunny stood before me awkwardly before sitting in the chair by my bed. He watched me with scrutiny. "Talk. What's on your mind?"

When I didn't reply right away, he said firmly, "I'm not leavin' 'til you start talkin'. So I suggest you start now."

It came out before I could stop myself. "Was I anyone before I was me? Was I ever something different?"

His green eyes met mine. "What's brought this on?"

"I dunno, I just feel like everything I doâ€¦none of it really matters in the end. I've tried to get my memories back, tried to get people to see me. Sandy gave me faith that it was possible, but now that he's goneâ€¦I want to give up. To go back to the way I was."

"That can't possibly be the quality of a Guardian. All I am is the 'invisible boy' who comes and goes with the seasons. I just ride around on the wind like nobody's business and that's all I'm ever going to do! It's not like I matter in the bigger picture. No one needs winter! No one cares about winter! I bet most people hate it anyway!"

I was shouting now, voice raw, almost in tears. Bunnymund seemed shocked by my outburst. He coughed nervously.

"What about those snow days ya keep braggin' about? Surely that's gotta count for somethin'?"

I sighed. "Maybe a bit, but not as much as dreams or memories. Probably not as much as whatever you've got as your center." I laughed brokenly. "Who cares if I'm alone for the rest of my miserable existence? I don't! I don't mind being alone, having fun or causing trouble wherever I go!"

"Then why are you complaining?"

"Because three hundred years is pushing it!" I couldn't stop it now; the floodgates burst. Tears coursed down my face without shame. "I'm done with this! With no purpose! With all these questions and no answers! It's silly that I just keep asking them, I know, but it's all I've got."

Bunny slapped me across my face. It stung. I put a hand over my burning cheek. Shocked.

The Auslandian Pooka scowled. "Then do something about it! It's about bloody time you take your own life in your own hands. Figure it out! Look inside yourself. That's what each and every one of us had to do to become who we are today. You might've been chosen to be the next Guardian, and MiM never said your road was gonna be easy, but he believes you can do it. We all do. And Sandy did too."

"Can't I just be useful once?" I asked horsely. "Needed, even?"

"That's the thing, Frostbite. We need you. For what, no one's sure yet except MiM." Bunny stood to leave. He glanced back at me. "I'm willin' to help you, but only if you stop moping and follow me. What d'ya say?"

In the end, I didn't say anything. I just stood up and followed him silently. We left my room and clambered up to the main deck. Bunny turned to me.

"Could ya give us a ride down to land? I'm trustin' you. Don't kill me."

I nodded. The wind was warm today. Full of sunlight. I almost wished it was cold and rainy, but the wind wasn't one to ask how I felt. It swirled around us, welcoming. I took Bunny's paw into my hand and flew slowly down to the nearest patch of land.

"Thanks mate." He tapped the ground with a foot. A hole opened up. "You coming? Or are ya too scared to see what's waitin'? It's just the Warren, in case you're wonderin'."

"As if I'd let myself be outrun by a rabbit."

It was the first and last thing I said before jumping in.

* * *

><p>Part II â€" The Vikings

Berk: The Cove (Hiccup's POV)

It felt like half a morning before I was able to get Toothless to hold still. He bounded around like a hyperactive wolf pup that just saw its first rabbit to kill. I'm guessing it was part flying again and part the eel around my neck under my vest's hem that decided to peek out randomly.

"Will you settle down?" I finally snapped after chasing him in a complete circle for the umpteenth time. "I need to get proper measurements or I can't get your tail to balance correctly! Do you honestly not want to fly again?"

That made him stop. Toothless gave me a narrow-eyed glare before sighing and lying on his stomach obediently.

"Good. Now open you tailfin."

He did as he was told.

"See, that wasn't so hard now, was it?"

Toothless made an indignant sound. I could practically feel how annoyed he was.

"Roll your eyes at me all you want. I'm not going to let you fly off without a proper tailfin!"

He ignored me. I sighed and reached into my vest pocket. The coil of rope was still there. It was about seven $\frac{3}{4}$ umal- \tilde{A} 'ln_ had a drawn line with every thumbs breadth or so. Unraveling the wet rope, I held it up and began measuring.

"Length: a bit over of an \tilde{A} 'ln_ and a half. Width: about two-third that from the smallest ray, a _stika_ from the longest. Let's seeâ€|"

I began to measure each individual ray. There were five, and all of them were of varying lengths. However, they were almost precisely the same distance apart, which made it much easier. I scratched each number into my notebook in charcoal. It smeared everywhere; looks like I didn't let it dry long enough.

I then measured the actual thing I built. Thankfully, the tailfin proved to be waterproof. And my measurements weren't completely off, which was an added bonus. There would be time for adjustments later.

"Toothless, could you let me hold your fin?"

He lowered it obligingly.

I held the tailfin in my hand, eyes closed. Being a blacksmith's apprentice helped when estimating length and weight, especially the later. "Quite light, but a bit less than a _fj \tilde{A} ³r \tilde{A} ^oungr_. I'll sayâ€| eight _merkur_ six _aurar_?"

As if anyone could confirm this.

My fin, however, was considerably heavier. I swore a bit. Hopefully there'd be time for adjustments that afternoon.

Wait, afternoon?

I looked up; damn, it was much later than I thought it was. I began grabbing everything, shoving the makeshift prosthetic into the empty fish basket and hefting it onto my back. Toothless turned around and watched me. His head cocked to one side.

"I have to go to class," I explained. "I'm probably late already. Again."

He snorted.

I narrowed my eyes. "Hey, don't laugh at me! It's not like you understand the importance of this stuff! I still have to appear like a normal Viking. It's hard enough without your help."

His look was an obvious 'your choice'. Toothless stood up and nudged me towards the exit of the cove. I couldn't help but laugh a bit. "What, that eager to get rid of me?"

I didn't need to look to understand him. I turned and patted Toothless on the snout.

"I'll miss you too, bud. Now, I'll try to be back later this afternoon if I can sneak out. And yes, I promise to bring more fish."

His head fins perked up. _Really?_

I laughed some more. "Really. Now be a good dragon and stay put."

He rolled his eyes, but nodded and sat down before me. Stroking Toothless's head one last time, I ran out of the cove without a backwards glance. It didn't hit me until I reached town that Toothless had understood every word I'd said. I almost was tempted to turn around and ask him about it when Astrid ran into me.

"Hiccup!"

"Astrid?"

"Where in Odin's name have you been? Gobber's been looking all over for you and class started eternities ago!" She kicked me in the shin. Hard.

"Ow! What was that for?"

"That's for being late," Astrid snapped. "Let's go."

Berk: The Cove (Toothless's POV)

He left in a hurry.

The boy could be annoying, but I could already feel some form of

attachment to him. Sympathetic, a bit worried even. Reflecting upon that strange feeling, I realized what it was. To be honest, it was quite shocking. I didn't think the soul bonding was this fast. I already trusted him.

Curious.

I snuck a glance back at the empty place on my tail. To the missing fin. I couldn't believe it. That human â€" my human, more specifically â€" had made one. He took it back with him babbling on something about adjusting "measurements." I did not care for these measurements, whatever they were. They prevented me from flying away.

But would I, given the chance? Fly away, I mean.

Two days ago, I would have. I would have flown away from this cursed, ancient land like no sun cycle. Nowâ€¦now I wasn't so sure.

I looked back at the secret entrance to the cove. Hiccup said he would be back later. Perhaps he'd have my new fin, completing all these strange measurements he spoke of. Then I could fly again.

How I longed to fly. I wanted to feel the wind again, to see the land from above. A dragon was born to fly. Sure, we had claws and teeth and spit fire and other cool things other inferior creatures wished they had, but our calling was the sky. Just having a taste of it again was the most satisfying activity since my unfortunate crash.

Yet at the same time, I craved for more. I wanted to be up in the sky again. The feeling of euphoria, of _being, _was all I wanted.

I'd heard horror stories of other dragons how had lost their ability to fly. If they didn't bleed out or were able to flee from the hoard of blood-seeking humans, they would eventually die one way or another. Usually it was starvation; how can one hunt for elk if they cannot attack from the sky after all? Either that, or they would take their own lives, unable to survive without their purpose. That, or they'd curl up inside themselves, never to open their eyes again.

I absentmindedly shot a few flames at some swimming fish. Most swam away, but a few floated up. Dead. I was about to eat them when the sound of approaching wings stopped me.

I glanced up to the sky. Sure enough, there were a group of seven or so Terrors fluttering down into the cove. Filthy little scavengers. I eyed them unenthusiastically.

Freedom! one of them began to cry joyously._ Finally, we are free!_

Free! they chorused._ We are free!_

I scoffed a bit. They heard me and flinched.

Night Fury?

Indeed, I replied. _What do you want? And will you please stop shouting? It's quite annoying._

A flurry of responses came.

Of course! We're sorry! No we're not! Yes we are! Pipe down you. Never! We found him, we found him! Now what? We should tell her! No we shouldn't! We found him! Shut up. No one cares what you have to say! We should tell her. Yes they do! Shut up! You shut up! I don't wanna go back! Can we stay here? Of course not. He'll eat us! No he won't. We dragons aren't cannibals! I don't want to go back! We heard you the first time! We found the Night Fury! I knew that already! Can't we stay here? Why not? It's better than there! Me too, don't forget me too! SHUT UP! ORDER DAMMIT!

Typical Terror behavior. Ask them one question and there will be chaos. I let them argue it out until they finally remembered the reason they were arguing in the first place.

We must answer the questions! Answer!

_Oh you don't say, _I said sarcastically.

They all tucked their wings in, embarrassed. Good. Looks like Terrors still understand shame.

We are sorry, Night Fury. Very sorry. Oh so sorry. Forgive us please!

This was going too far. _Just answer the question, _I growled.

We were sent by the Queen!

Her? My anger was barely masked. I guess the Terrors sensed it because they all began to shy away. _Don't you ever say __**her **__name in my presence again! Do you understand?_

There was another flurry of apologies. During this time, none of us noticed one little Terror sneak away from the rest of the pack and fly away from the cove. If I had, it would've saved me a heck of a lot of trouble. But I didn't, and the fates decided to play their little game with us.

That one terror practically ruined my life.

Berk: Dragon Training Arena (Hiccup's POV)

"Today," said Gobber, "is about teamwork. Now, a wet dragon head can't light its fire. The Hideous Zippleback is extra tricky. It has two heads: One that breathes the gas, and another that lights it. Your job is to determine which is which."

The Zippleback's gas began to surround us. We were all separated into pairs, each of us only equipped with a bucket of water. To say the least we were moving up in difficulty. Go figures the two left without partners was Fishlegs and myself.

Fishlegs, to help himself calm down, went off on all the killer attributions of a Zippleback. "Razor-sharp serrated teeth that inject venom for pre-digestion. Prefers ambush attacks, crushing its victims-"

"Will you please stop that," I hissed. The last thing I wanted to hear was about how one could die from a Zippleback.

I could hear Snotlout to my left somewhere. "If that dragon shows either of its faces, I'm gonnaâ€¦there!"

There were a couple of grunts followed by the indignant cries from the girls. No doubt they were the victims of the water the boys threw.

"Hey!" said Ruffnut. "It's us, idiots."

Tuff scoffed. "Your butts are getting bigger. We thought you were a dragon."

"Not that there's anything wrong with a _dragonesque_ figure." Real smooth Snot. Just a good way to try and woo the girls. As if it'd work.

My predictions were correct. I heard the sound of flesh hitting flesh; so he got punched. Nice. Then more splashing followed by a grunt from Tuffnut. I learned later that his sister threw a full bucket at his head before he was dragged into the clearing smoke with a shout.

I could make them out now. A tail came out and whipped the legs out from under the girls. Tuffnut was running out of the fog, retrieving his hat on the way out. "Oh, I'm hurt! I am very much hurt!"

As he ran by, Fishlegs murmured, "Chances of survival are dwindling into single digits nowâ€¦"

I couldn't help but agree with him.

Then a single green, scaly, yellow-eyed head came weaving out of the mist. It was making the strange clicking throaty sound I'd heard Toothless make. It sniffed the air and barely glanced at me. In fact, it ignored me completely. Did I smell of the Night Fury?

The Zippleback head went to Fishlegs, who dodged it while wobbling backwards. He splashed it with the water. The Zippleback's eyes narrowed as green smoke began to pour out of its mouth.

"Oops," 'Legs laughed nervously. "Wrong head."

He ran screaming as he was engulfed in green. Even Gobber seemed concerned for our lack of ability. "Fishlegs!"

Now all the fog was gone. The second Zippleback head appeared. This one, though, didn't care what I smelled like. It began to spark from the back of its throat. I angled my body so I could throw the water most effectively.

"Now, Hiccup!" Gobber shouted.

I tried. I truly did. But my weak arms couldn't throw the water anywhere near as high as the Zippleback's head. All I had was an angry, two-headed dragon standing before me with nothing but an empty bucket to defend myself with. Not the most favorable of situations.

"Oh, come on!" I groaned. The Zippleback stepped forward, heads roaring hoarsely and wings spread in an attack stance. I tripped and fell flat on my backside.

"Hiccup!" Gobber shouted. I heard his peg leg clacking against the stone floor, but stop. As did any concern anyone might've had.

I stood as the Zippleback began to back away in fear. Why did it? All that happened when I fell was my vest falling open andâ€¦

Oh. I still had that eel from the morning. So they were all afraid of this! Using this new knowledge, I decided to show off a little. You can't blame me for wanting to do that, can you? I haven't had a chance to show off anything except my undeniable lameness for the last almost-sixteen years of my life.

"Back, back, back!" I shouted, shoving my hands as threateningly as possible in front of me. "Now, don't you make me tell you again! Yes, that's right. Back into your cage. Now think about what you've done."

I threw the eel into the cage for good measure. The Zippleback backed against the wall as far away from the offending object. Once they were there, I closed the cage's doors and wiped my hands on the front of my vest. Then I turned around.

Everyone was staring at me in shock. Fishlegs, who still had his bucket clutched tightly to his chest, dropped it.

I cleared my throat. "Okay, soâ€¦are we done? 'Cause I've got some things I need toâ€¦um, yep. I'll, uh, see you tomorrow."

I ran out of the arena without a backwards glance. I had some research to do and some fish to catch. Toothless was no doubt waiting for me.

The Sea: Dragon Raiding Party

Stoick looked to the dismal horizon. The dragon attacks had finally subsided and he was taking the time to analyze the situation. So far things looked bleak. It seemed the spirit of the party was slowly deteriorating the longer they were out to sea. It didn't help that the last attack had been a bloody one. The moans of the injured were the only sound aside from the ever-constant rocking of the sea.

Stoick turned to his brother, Spitelout. "How are the conditions?"

"We've lost one of the boats, and at least ten men and women. The food's good, but we're running low on water. I'd say we can only last another week before things become critical."

"I see." The news wasn't good. At this rate, there'd be no chance in finding the Nest and returning safely.

Sensing his brother's hesitation, Spitelout asked his brother, "What do you plan to do?"

"We'll stay out sailing for another two days," he decided. "If there is no sight of the Nest, we'll turn around. Make sure all the injured are taken care of. Make sure the word gets to everyone."

Spitelout stood to attention and left. Stoick sighed. He couldn't face another defeat, to give up again, but there was no choice. He had to put the welfare of the village and all of its Vikings first.

The Viking chief allowed himself a moment to sit alone on the prow and pray. He prayed to every god he could think of for everything he could think to pray for. He prayed for the safety and recovery of the remaining crew. He prayed for their safe return. He prayed for the souls of the ten who'd lost their lives that day, that they would all feast in the halls of Valhalla. But most of all, Stoick the Vast prayed for his son. He prayed that Hiccup was doing well, that he wasn't in pain from the expectations placed on his scrawny little shoulders.

Stoick could feel tears pushing for release. He almost let them out then and there when a shout came from the other ship.

"Dragons! Dragons to portside!"

Wiping his eyes and drawing his blade, Stoick stood and roared, "Leave none alive! Stand and fight! Fight for our future! Fight for our children, both lost and alive! Fight for our ancestors!"

A rumble of voices chorused his. Stoick brandished his sword for all to see as they cheered. Yes, this was the Stoick they knew. This was their chief. The ruler of the Vikings. And he still had this duty to fulfill. And he would until Hiccup truly was ready for it to become his own duty.

Berk: The Hall of Records (Hiccup's POV)

"Hey Hiccup."

I looked up, surprised to see Fishlegs standing before me. He shuffled awkwardly from foot to foot. I frowned. "Can I help you, Fish?"

"Umâ€¦" he hesitated, then blurted out, "Do you mind if I sit with you?"

"Not at all."

"Really?" His face lit up. Relieved.

"Yeah, no problem. Wait, let me clear a spot for you."

Considering the hall of records was empty save the two of us and a mountain of parchment it wasn't that hard. Pushing a stack of scrolls aside I offered him my seat and sat on the other side on the table. We sat there in silence for a few moments.

"Soâ€¦" he said after a while. "Were you able to find anything on Night Furies?"

"How did you know I was looking for-"

"Stuff on Night Furies? I heard you asking Gobber about them during training yesterday." Go figures. Was I really that obvious? Fishlegs didn't seem to care. In fact, he seemed quite interested too. "I was going through some old journals last year and I stumbled across this. This way."

I followed as he led me to the back of the cramped hall. It was dark; I lit a few lanterns and stared up. The ceiling had to be at least four _faÃ°mr_ high.

Now let me explain the Hall of Records for a moment. This was a basement room that was about ten rows of shelves from floor to ceiling crammed with every potentially legibly (and even not so) written piece of paper, book, scroll, recipe, map, and whatever else anyone would store there stored there. It was a place of absolute chaos. It was also the place Fishlegs and I used to hang out and talk. That was, before I became an apprentice blacksmith and he was accepted by Astrid and the others.

Back to the story.

"Um, Fishlegs? Care to explain?"

"Right." He smiled eagerly. Great, here was his inner bookworm. Not that I really minded. "Last year I decided it was about time that someone had all of our history documented and filed properly. This place has been a mess for all three hundred years it's been around and I mean to end that. But then I found something hidden in the back of the top shelf. Hold up, let me grab it for you."

He went over to one of the shelves and climbed up a ladder to the tallest level. Burying his arm as far as it could go Fishlegs managed to yank out what appeared to be a leather-bound notebook quite similar to mine. He was climbing down when one of the rungs gave under his foot and he toppled on top of me.

It hurt a lot, but I remained impassive. More for his sake than anything. 'Legs seemed to take it hard.

Once the customary apologies were out of the way we made our way back to the table. Fishlegs placed the notebook on the table between our seats (after seeing how easily the ladder gave, I felt sitting on this ancient table probably wasn't the best idea). Up close, I could see this journal was old; almost all of the pages were worn and thin, the pages more yellow than their original parchment hue. Fishlegs pointed to it dramatically.

"This is the last recorded journal of Bork the Brave. I managed to unearth it some time ago!"

Fascinating. Though why was it forgotten? Bork the Brave was one of the most famous people in our Viking history. He was the writer of the book of dragons.

"Why didn't anyone else notice it before?" I asked.

Fishlegs gestured pointedly at all the information stored around us. I nodded.

"Okay, that's a start."

He smiled and relaxed a bit. "This journal was also signed by Bork the Very Very Unfortunate, before he was dubbed 'brave.' Only a few know which name to look for."

I thought I remembered Gobber saying something about a Very Very Unfortunate as his distant ancestor, a great-great grandfather or something. I began to flip through the pages. Most of the information I recognized from my brief reading of the book of dragons, minus the 'extremely dangerous' and 'kill on sight' bits. I guess Bork wasn't a killer by nature.

"This is really fascinating, Fish, but what's this got to do with Night Furies?"

"I was about to get to that. Okay, so you know how the book of dragons doesn't have much of anything in it on Night Furies?"

"Yeah?"

"Well, the last few pages explain why." Fishlegs reached over and flipped to it. "They cap the one and only encounter with the Night Fury. It also explains how Bork came to the conclusion that a Night Fury is born from lightning and death itself. You see, one day during a storm he wa-"

"Okay, Fish, I think I'll just read it now."

"Oh, okay," he said. "I'll let you do that."

I turned back to the pages and began to read. "Today I saw a sight no man was meant to seeâ€¦"

. . . HTTYD . . .

_Today I was a sight that no man was meant to see. _

Though no one knows where or even when a dragon is conceived, my suspicions lie in the hatching from an egg, for a dragon is a reptilian creature. Yet no one has ever witnessed the creation of a dragon. But I have. It was a sight truly to behold and one that filled me with the most uncharacteristic fear.

It was nighttime; Thor was brewing a mighty storm from the heavens. I was out in this storm gathering the last of the kindling to store indoors when the unthinkable happened.

From the shadows of the forest came a man. I would not dare call him an ordinary man, for he only had the shape of one. This manlike creature materialized from the shadows; he wore robes of black that seemed to flow around him, and around every surrounding tree from what I could gather. Though he never looked me in the eye, I saw them glint amber in the light.

_He turned his back to me and faced a ditch in the forest. What was in this I could not see, but I feel my eyes deceived me as I watched the shadows flowed into this crevice and form the figure of a dragon. He said something to it in a tongue I have never heard, but it

sounded cold. My blood froze I heard him speak, as though death had come to take my life in the most unholy of ways._

As this deathly figure muttered his evil incantation, a single bolt of lightning struck it. Thor had intervened. Yet it did no good.

From the shadows rose the dragon. The shadows writhed and dissipated from its form. I had naught a clear view, nor an inkling as to why the gods chose me to witness this. I saw that the lightning Thor had blasted at this creature did not kill it.

I could feel the frustration of the god. His storm became more violent. The deathly figure laughed, his voice rising with exhilaration. It terrified me to the core, but not as much as this next scene I shall describe in sparse detail.

In the flash of lightning, with its wings spread, it looked as tall as the tallest trees. It shot fire as purple as lightning Thor shot at it. Was this his godly creature, or was it corrupted by darkness? I could not answer it if I indeed had to.

_I was backing away when a branch snapped under my foot. The beast's glowing green as it found mine. _

I ran.

The one and only Night Fury screeched as he went to pursue it. The unholy offspring of lightning and Death itself. Just that one glance with its eyes told me that I should never engage this dragon. I ran until I had no more energy left to run. All I did, all I could do in that forest was hide. Hide and pray to the gods that it wouldn't find me.

. . . HTTYD . . .

I exhaled slowly after I finished reading this passage. There was no way this could be Toothlessâ€¦could it? Could it? I thought for a moment. I had no idea how old he was, or what power he was capable of. In fact, no one knows how many Night Furies there are. There was ever only one attacking at once.

Was this shadow of a monster Toothless? Was that person in the cloak Death? Was the lightning a gift or a curse from Thor?

Gods, if only I could find out.

Fishlegs let me sit there alone for a moment in my own thoughts before excusing himself. Yet still I sat there until my candle had burned down to nothing but a glowing stub. Finally getting up, I pocketed the thing and went home.

It was so empty. I went upstairs to my bed, longing for some company.

I wanted to see Toothless again.

I thought about his fin for a moment. There was no way I could design something that would hold it open, let alone control it. I couldn't think of a way. Unlessâ€¦|unlessâ€¦|

No, it was crazy! There was no way I could manually do it for Toothless! Not unless I rode him! Could I get him to let me ride him? To control his flight? Granted, it would take a lot of practice, not to mention a lot of work and experimenting. But if I could do it!

Just the thought of it made me more excited than anything had ever before. Just the thought of flying free through the sky made goosebumps rise on my arms. Oh gods, how the view was from the sky! How much fresher the wind was up there! How I longed for more!

I ran to the forge. A new idea was brewing, and this one involved a lot of metal and a saddle.

One all-nighter later, I decided to quit doing all-nighters. However, despite my exhaustion, my saddle came out looking quite sharp. Hopefully Toothless would think so too!

North of Berk: The Nest

The Queen heard the approach of tiny wings fluttering towards her. The dragon that those wings belonged to flew in, exhausted, and landed on a nearby rock. Based on the weight of the landing, it was a smaller creature. Most probably a Terror. The Queen shifted slightly from the volcanic pit she lay upon.

**Terror?**

Yes, my lady?

So it was one of the ones she sent on the search party. She smiled on the inside. _**I presume you have promising news for me, my creature?**_

Well!

**Speak!**

We found the Night Fury, your highness, but he is beyond the reach of your powers. As for us, we were out of your control as well. I returned to serve you, but the others have left. The Terror hesitated before adding, _And I believe, if I'm not mistaken, that the Night Fury attempted a soul bond. Whether it was a success or not I have no idea._

_**I see. This is troubling indeed. **_She thought for a second, then said, _**Very well, I must get the creature back using my ally. Pitch Black will know what to do with the Night Fury situation. As for you, a reward for your services. You are no longer needed with the gathering party. Allow yourself some rest.**_

Thank you, my lady. 'Twas most thoughtful of you!

The Green Death sighed. This was troubling indeed.

* * *

><p>Well, I'm exhausted! Friday was my first college visit (holy sh*t! I'm growing up!). That was fun and tiring all at the same

time.

_If anyone really wants to know where I got these measurements Hiccup used, you can find them at:

>www. vikinganswerlady measurement .shtml_

_Good thing is is that I get to sleep in for the rest of this week (state standardized testing for sophomores) so perhaps I'll hit the next chapter soon. As for Phil, he'll show up more. My friend convinced me enough to make him a regular. _

Okay, that's enough from me. Hasta la pasta~

Sushi

8. We All Hold Grudges, We All Can Change

Hello again! Happy Early Easter (though I'm not religious)!

Excuse: I had three projects and five tests before the end of the grading period. Then my birthday decided to come along and take up two days of my time. And I had a few requests for Hetalia I started. After completing all these tedious tasks, I took a few of days off to recuperate my creative juices.

_In case anyone missed the edit to the author's note last chapter, I wanted to give credit to __**Lily Sevin **__(who you can all find on SoundCloud; she's an absolutely amazing singer!) because I used her song __**Something Different**__. So yes, if anything sounded really damn familiar, it's because I *borrowed* it._

Now, on with the story!

* * *

><p>8 â€" We All Hold Grudges, We All Can Change

* * *

><p>Part I â€" The Guardians

Auslandia (Jack's POV)

The ride through the tunnel was interesting to say the least. It was like a slip-and-slide made from smooth grass. I spun just as much as on North's sleigh, but this time there was no sound aside from my body gliding along the walls.

Before long I was thrown up into the sky. I managed to land on my feet with the help of the wind. When I popped out, the sudden sunlight was somewhat disorienting. I blinked a few times. By the time my eyes adjusted a few moments later Bunnymund was standing behind me.

We were in what appeared to be a large clearing. At the top of a hill on a well-beaten dirt path, to be specific. On either side was grass as high as my waist. At the bottom of the hill was a circle of tall trees. I could make out something within the circle, but we were too

far away to see clearly. The scenery of grassland and trees stopped suddenly as reddish dirt flowed and crisscrossed across the horizon.

The sun was shining high in the sky. The breeze, which made the grass sway gently, was uncomfortably warm. So we were in the southern hemisphere. Great, why would Bunny take me to the southern hemisphere knowing full well the only cold place there during that time was Southarctica?

"This is the Warren?" I asked.

"Nope," he replied. "I lied. Thought you wouldn't follow me if I didn't put out a place your curiosity would make you go to."

"Gee, thanks Kangaroo."

"You're welcome, Frostbite."

A hand rested on my shoulder. Wait, hand? I turned around to see a man standing there. He looked about six foot, tanned, bare-chested, and well-muscled. He was barefoot, but wore beige cutoff shorts. There were tribal tattoos across his arms. He had long grey hair that went halfway down his back, tied into a scruffy ponytail. I didn't recognize him at first.

However, those green eyes with that irritated expression were unmistakable.

"Bunny?"

"The very same." He stared at my shocked expression. "What? Didn't know a Pooka was a shape shifter now, did ya?"

I shook my head. He smirked.

"Well now you know. Come on, I'll talk on the way there."

"Where are we going?" I asked, matching his long strides.

Bunny hesitated. "My old village."

"So we're in Auslandia?"

"Do you need a big welcome sign or something, Frost?" he huffed.

"That'd be helpful," I remarked.

He sighed. Great, I annoyed him again. "Fine. Welcome to Auslandia."

We walked in silence, but my curiosity got the better of me. By the time I decided to speak we were at the bottom of the hill by the trees. They were at least two hundred feet high, fifty of them making a tight circle with trunks as wide as my arms spread out three times. The only entrance I could see was before us, only enough space for two to walk through at a time.

There was no way this could be natural; only magic could create such

trees.

"Okay, talk," I demanded. "Your hatred towards Pitch is way worse than anyone I knew. Tell me what he did."

Bunny hesitated for a moment. I thought he was going to walk away, but instead his eyes followed the path to the circle of trees. He gestured at it unnecessarily. "It'll be easier to show ya, bucco. After you."

I trusted him enough to follow.

Inside the circle was a village. Imagine hobbit holes. Well, those things were everywhere. At least thirty or so from a quick count I did. There was a path through the middle of the village where empty stalls and trinket shops lined up. Everywhere I looked there was something that I could see supporting life. Abandoned gardens, a shaman-y looking hut, some boomerangs still left half-finished. It looked as though everyone had just disappeared one day.

"Wow," I gasped in awe.

Bunny smirked. "Glad it impresses you. This was the place I grew up. Until I was a Guardian, I called this village home. I probably would've called this home and died with it as home if it hadn't been for Pitch."

I looked at him as we made a circle around the village. "So what did Pitch do?"

He stopped to find the right words.

"You don't need to tell me," I said.

"Naw, already brought you here. No point in having you ask me questions forever." He smiled. "But first, we should start from the beginning. I was born Eucalyptus Aster Bunnymund."

"Woah woah, time out," I interrupted immediately, which didn't bode with Bunny too well. "Your first name is Eucalyptus? Like the tree koala bears live in?"

His eyes narrowed. "It's tradition. In the Pooka culture, your first name is a plant, your middle human, your last the one handed down through your family. To end confusion, we go by the first letter of the first name and the full middle name. So yes, my first name is Eucalyptus. But everyone knew me as E. Aster. Anything else you'd like to add?"

"No, keep going." I didn't want to tell him to his face, but I was really curious as to why he tunneled me over to Auslandia.

"Anyway," he sighed. "I was born and raised hereâ€¦"

"When I was born, the Pooka population was a grand and well-known one. We were nearly fifty thousand strong and admired for our skills in woodwork and farming. Granted, looking around here, it doesn't look like Auslandia is much of a farmland place, but it once was. Great trees grew in groves over a land of green grass, blue skies, and clear waters.

"My village was one of the smallest ones, but a fairly busy one at that. It was one of the great landways, and just as important and prestigious as today's skyways. Seaways we are weary of, for earth is our element and straying away from it is cursed.

"I lived with my parents, my three older sisters, and my little brother. Unlike common belief, it's rare for a family of Pookas to raise more than two or three children in a lifetime. We don't 'breed like rabbits'. So the fact that I had four siblings was pretty incredible.

"Pookas are revered for their skills in anything related to land too. We're all usually natural-born artists. I wasn't. But we were all good at the simple tasks like tunneling or whittling, but I was especially gifted at fighting.

"My parents and most of the village chastised me for it. Not severely, but I wasn't allowed on any hunting parties. Pookas are gentle creatures; it's rare for us to get into fights.

"But my nature wouldn't subside. While everyone else was content with their simple lives, I wanted to get out into the world. So when I was a teen, not much older than you, I packed my bags and moved to the city of Sydney. There I became an apprentice to a shaman. He taught me the true art of using magic with the earth.

"I studied with him for five years before the Genocide."

I interrupted again. "Genocide? What genocide?"

Bunny wasn't exactly sure how to answer for a few seconds. He sat down in the grass and motioned for me to sit beside him. I did. Bunny swung an arm around the abandoned grove. "Look around, Frostbite. See anything here that's a bit odd to you."

"Aside from the abandonedness?"

"Aside from that."

I did. There wasn't much I hadn't missed from the whole look-around earlier. Homes that were built into hills, grassy fields, paths leading to various areas, sunlight streaming in from the leaves above. I didn't like to admit defeat, but I didn't see anything out of the ordinary. So I shook my head.

"No flowers grow here."

"Pardon?" I looked at the man next to me. "Did you say flowers?"

Bunny nodded. "Whenever Pookas open tunnels, they close up and flowers bloom in their place. It's a way of conveying who went from point A to point B. Though the flowers shrivel up and die anywhere else in the world, in Auslandia they continue to bloom. That is, until the Pooka who made the tunnel dies.

"The only flowers that bloom from a dead Pooka are the ones covering his or her grave. And those that cover a murdered grave come only in eternal red."

He stood up and walked to the edge of the grove. I was able to make out a path leading out, but it was so overgrown with tall grass I hadn't noticed it at first. Following Bunny out, I leapt through the tiny opening.

Once again the sun decided to blind me for a few seconds. I shielded my eyes with a hand, blinking to clear away the light. When my eyesight did return I was taken aback by what I saw. Bunny heard my gasp and clasped my shoulder tightly.

Stretching at least a mile was a patchwork quilt of red. I hadn't noticed them earlier because they almost blended in with the red sand of the plain. But now I could see little flowers scattered in uneven heaps.

They had bright red petals and golden-brown pollen-y insides. The stems were darker, burgundy with veins of rouge threading through them. Something about them there, innocently blooming, was horrifically morbid.

A slight breeze blew, making the soft petals tickle my ankles. I backed away, mortified, and looked at Bunny. His eyes were hard, shining.

"There was a prophecy. One that foretold Pitch's next plan. Remember the black sand?"

"The nightmares? Yeah."

"I'm sure Sandy was upset when he saw it."

I remembered his uncontrollable rage. "A bit more than just upset, I think."

Bunny smirked. "Well, the last time Pitch'd tried to use the stuff was for this. He was slowly gathering dreams and turning them into nightmares for fifty years, waiting for a moment to strike. However, the Man in the Moon figured out his plan, so he decided it was time to create another Guardian.

"Back then, there was one wise woman. She lived in the far north, somewhere few venture. She had a vision. A vision that told her the race of the next Guardian. She said, 'Next of the Moonlight Guard is one who can change his face, one who can control the waves of the earth. He who is a fierce fighter and a skilled artist.'

"No one knew of the wise woman's vision. But then Pitch found her. She told him of this prophecy. No one had heard of a wise woman since, no doubt that Boogeyman got her after that. He was able to piece the clues together. So he had a mission."

Bunny paused, clearly emotional. He began to walk down one of the paths between the clusters of flowers. I followed him carefully. Though I knew the answer, I asked, "What did Pitch want?"

"To annihilate every Pooka." Bunny's eyes met mine and I could see all the hurt in them. "So he went after them. One village at a time with his army of nightmares. No one was spared" not the old, not the young, not the weak or pregnant or injured. No one.

"I was so close to being lucky. I was still in Sydney, crafting wooden eggs. It wasn't my best skill then, but I was getting better at it and I knew it. It was then that my eldest sister, L. Marcella, came to get me. She was half-dead by that time, bleeding out in the street. But she told me what was happening. She told me to flee, to make the first tunnel out of the country.

"Being an idiot, I refused her word. Instead, I went back to my home. It wasn't a pretty sight. Everywhere I looked, there was death and blood and pain. I can still remember the way my kin screamed and cried as they were killed."

He took a shuddering breath. I didn't push him to continue, but he did.

"I fought as hard as I could. I had these boomerangs here; crafted them myself in Sydney. Wrecked nightmare after nightmare. Pitch was able to manipulate them into any shape he desired. He used fear as well. Hundreds upon hundreds of images that terrified the ones they destroyed."

I cleared my throat. "So you were killed then?"

"No."

"No?"

"No." Bunny kept walking towards the middle of the field. I flew beside him. "I was hurt, but not dead. The Guardians showed up at the nick of time. Back then it was just Sandy and Tooth. They attacked the nightmares, turned them back to good dreams, and had Pitch fleeing. Neither of them noticed me. I was just another nearly-dead Pooka lying in the dirt."

"So how were you turned?" I asked. "Tooth told me only the dead are brought back as Guardians."

"She's right. I did die, but later on. I died after I buried everyone in my village." He laughed hollowly. "Dug each of them an individual grave, made sure everyone was buried by kin. It took me three days of work without food or water. And I didn't stop."

Bunny approached a small crop of flowers. To me they looked like any other, but I could tell they meant something more to him. "And after I buried my family and watched the red flowers grow over the graves, I died."

I stared. So the flowers at his feet wereâ€

Bunny took a moment to place an egg by his family's grave. I saw it wasn't like the ones in the Warren; this one was wooded and painted with skill that could only be acquired with years of practice.

After that, he turned around back to the grove. I followed. He continued. "That night, MiM took me to Central â€" though it wasn't much of a town then â€" and revived me. He gave me the duty to find my center. Took me nearly two hundred years to do it. Probably wouldn't have found it either if it hadn't been for the Groundhog."

"Groundhog? That stodgy old season-changer?"

"He may not seem like much since humans have ridiculed his kin into 'seeing their shadows' and that load of crap, but he used to be a Guardian-like figure when it came to the seasons. Controlled when they'd come and go before you and I came into existence. Plus, he's one of the greatest scholars in the world. Him and the Wise Old Owl."

"I still find it hard to believe," I mumbled.

"Gotta agree with you, mate, but the truth's the truth. With his help, I was able to cope becoming immortal. But I didn't have a purpose. It was that Groundhog that suggested I went back to Auslandia and reconnected with my roots. So I did. Packed what few belongings I had and headed to one of the last sustaining villages.

"After the genocide, there was a small collection of Pookas left in the world. The number's grown to about three thousand now, but it used to be only a couple of hundred when I went back. But when they saw me, they recognized me from the stories carried by the roos across Auslandia. Of a sole survivor of my village who put everyone to rest and was given eternal life for it. I was hailed as a hero." Bunny smiled a bit. "I gave them all hope that the lives of my people would eventually get better, just like the legends of our ancestors."

"So that's what you're the Guardian of, right?" He looked at me. I clarified. "Hope, I mean."

He seemedâ€¦impressed? I couldn't tell, but it seemed that way. "Yeah, that's right. Took me bloody ages to figure that out. Due to that, Old Nick beat me to the title of Guardian. So I'm technically the last one. 'Youngest of my guard,' as MiM likes to tell me all the time.

"Anyway, I took the season of spring from Groundhog. Pissed him off a good deal, but we try to look past that. Spring, I felt, symbolized new hope. Everything becomes new and fresh. After they die in autumn and get buried in winter, wildlife still manages to thrive with the coming of spring."

Of course he said that in front of the winter spirit. I could see his point though. I shuffled awkwardly from foot to foot. Bunny noticed my discomfort and punched me gently on the shoulder. "Don't fret about it. Winter's not half bad either, once you get past the never ending cold, that is."

"Gee, thanks," I deadpanned.

"You're welcome." After a moment of silence, Bunny coughed awkwardly. "So that's that. Any questions?"

"Yeah, just one. Where'd the pants come from?"

Bunny's lip twitched on the corner. "Really, Frost? I tell you my whole life story and all you ask are where my pants come from?"

I shrugged nonchalantly, but in reality I was thinking. Then I asked in all seriousness, "Why eggs?"

"Ya mean for Easter?"

I nodded. By then we were back in the grassy grove. Bunny sat down and patted the ground next to him. I joined after a moment, flopping heavily on my back and feeling the ground harden under me.

Bunny thought for a moment. "When I was staying with Groundhog, right around when I created the Warren, he let me read one of his many books on Pooka history. One of them was a collection of stories from our early tribes. The one that stuck out to me was a moral story. I heard it as a runt, but I never thought about it till then.

"It began with a foolish Pooka who made a bet that one could live without the love of land. He claimed that only inferior creatures were capable of creation. So he shed his Pooka identity and his powers to nature. This angered the spirits of the world, who blessed the Pookas with their abilities to understand the earth. So they condemned him with a life of misery."

"What's this gotta do with eggs?" I asked.

"I'm getting there. Patience, Frost." He sighed. "Due to this curse, no aspect of land wanted to be near him. The ground burned his feet, the food turned to ash in his mouth, and all the creatures and animals of the land were repelled from him. The foolish Pooka realized he was hated by all, that he lost everything he truly lived for. Realizing his mistake, he wished to die, for he had no place in the world.

"The spirits took pity on him, for he was young and ignorant of the power of wishes. So they gave him a riddle. 'Find a place created in the sea and the sky that can be made on land. A room with fragile walls that contains gold, but has no windows or doors. Find the gold from a sacred room in a tunnel not made by any man. With it you will find salvation.'

"So for fifty years this Pooka went in search of a room with no entrances, suffering in vain hopes of being truly free of his suffering. By then, he was old and decrepit. He was tired. By chance his foot fell into the hole of a kiwi nest. By accident, he crushed kiwi within. Yet as he pulled out its dead body, he found an egg. And when he ate the egg, he realized the ground no longer burned. He was free."

I cut off any further story with a sharp tap of my staff on his bare stomach. "Okay, not I'm seriously confused. He stepped on a bird? And this bird's egg was sacred?"

"Yes."

I was dumbfounded, to say the least.

"Don't overthink it."

"I'm trying not to," I retaliated.

"The point is the egg is a sacred food for the Pooka. When asked

which came first, the chicken of the egg, it's an old saying of ours. Meaning that either can come first, for it's a cycle that never ends. It also gives hope of new life. The foolish Pooka learned his lesson and was reborn to become one of the wisest shamans in the world as the legend goes. I thought it fitting when Easter became a symbolizer of spring and new hope. Make sense?"

"Kindaâ€¦!"

He stood up. Bunny watched me for a long moment before saying, "Just promise me you'll remember one thing, Frostbite."

I cocked my head to one side. "What would you want me to promise? If it's no more Easter blizzards, I can try, but I can't swear to it."

"Ha ha," he laughed robotically. "No, it's not that. What you were saying earlier, about only having unanswered questions. How that's all you've got. It's not."

That was different. "What?"

"You've got us. All of us. I don't agree with it, probably never will, but MiM chose you. You were chosen for a reason to be one of us. A Guardian." He turned and looked me dead-on in the eyes. "Sure, ya don't have your memories. You don't have the answers you need. But you've got us, and I swear to the moon I'll help ya find your purpose if I must. You're not alone in this, Frostbite."

Though it was from Bunny, I felt moved yet again in such a short week. I could feel the emotions lodging in my chest and throat, swallowing thickly and tried to find the right words. None came. Instead, I choked out, "Thank you."

"No more waterworks?"

"You kidding?" I laughed. "Not in your wildest dreams."

"Pity." But his smile took the sting out of the words.

"Shall we head back? I don't want the others worrying over where we are. For all they know, I've been kidnapped by you and forced to fight to the death. Or vice versa."

That got a real laugh out of him. He tapped his foot on the ground and a hole opened up. "Here, this'll take us close enough to the ship to fly without risk of death."

"Can't guarantee it!" I shouted before hopping in. I could practically imagine Bunny rolling his eyes before following me in.

Aurora Borealis â€" Somewhere over the Sea (Jack's POV)

We were back on the ship in moments. At least, for me. Bunny looked like he was having a seizure. What? I promised he would get back alive, I never guaranteed he would be happy about it. I just about had to sprint when we hit the deck of the ship to spare my neck.

"That was fun!" I gasped.

His lip twitched in the corner, but he decided on a scowl. "Not in your wildest dreams, Frost."

I was about to make a snowball to fling at his face when I heard a growl from the shadowy corner near the captain's quarters. Turning, I saw a dragon " the same boulder-like one from the fight those days before. I went on attack mode when a big brown furry something flew into me and batted my staff away. I glowered at it before I recognized who it was.

"Phil?"

The yeti began warbling in some panicked speech. His arms flailed in front of my face before pointing to the rock-dragon-thing and back at me. As if I could understand him.

Sensing the commotion, North and Tooth (as well as the other yetis) came out to see what was going on. Phil began to warble something to the other yetis while I retrieved my staff. The others, who I remembered knew that language, suddenly rounded on me. They were bombarding me with questions about my sudden attack.

I was confused to say the least.

"Okay, can someone please explain exactly what I missed? Preferably someone who can speak" I almost expected Sandy to try and explain stuff to me, but then I remembered he was no longer. I saved myself that pain. "not yeti."

"Ancient Tibetan," Bunny muttered, but I chose to ignore him.

Tooth started instead. "Well, after you left to your room and didn't come out North, Bunny, and I went to remove the evidence from the town."

I thought back to the blood, injured dragons, black sand, and charred buildings. "How'd you guys manage that?"

"Magic," North answered. "We fix everything back to normal and came back. But we found this dragon frozen to building roof."

I remembered that dragon. Its eyes were so scared then after I shot it down.

North kept speaking. "She was trying to escape and tore her wing while trying. We decided to help her until she can fly again. Who knows, maybe she can help us find Pitch."

I nodded slowly. In all honesty I wasn't sure why everyone was convinced the dragon was a she.

"So Phil's taking care of her?"

"That is correct."

"Cool! What're gonna call her?"

The answer was not clear to me; it sounded a bit like Wurshurgle-Wuh.

I nodded. "'Kay, I'll just call her Roxy or something."

Somehow, everyone but Phil found it hilarious. They laughed, he glared. And I couldn't help but laugh along with them. Especially after seeing Phil's face.

"I think I'll take a quick flight," I stated. "If that's okay with everyone else."

North thought about it for a second, then clasped his hands together. "Okay, but Tooth must go with you."

I shrugged. "Fine."

"Okay! Just let me get my bag first!"

As Tooth fluttered away, Bunny hopped over to me. "Listen mate, if you can promise not to destroy anything, maybe I'll let you see the Warren sometime. Probably not your taste, but still. But only if you want to. And you promise not to behave."

"Sounds like a plan." I grinned. "Thanks. For today."

Bunny nodded and patted me on the back before going below decks. Tooth flew out a moment later, a large brown messenger bag thrown over her shoulder and bumping against her hip. Baby Tooth followed, settling down on my shoulder. I nuzzled her cheek with a finger.

Tooth smiled. "Ready to go?"

"After you," I replied with a mock-courteous bow. "Ladies first, after all."

"Oh, what a gentleman!" She laughed, Baby Tooth rolled her eyes, and we took off towards the setting sun.

* * *

<p>Part II â€" The Vikings

Berk: The Cove (Hiccup's POV)

Ends up Toothless wasn't all too thrilled about the saddle. He growled and ran away the moment I held it up. I yelled and chased him. This was turning into the tailfin scene all over again.

He finally stopped after I tossed the saddle into his face.

"Look, can I just explain myself?" I asked. Toothless glared. I sighed and ran a hand through my hair. "Let's just look at this situation logically for a second, okay?"

The Night Fury snuffed and sat before me.

"Good. Okay, it's not like I want to control you or anything. It's just that you can't fly with the tailfin. Not without some sort of control mechanism which I have no idea how to design. So you've got two options.

"One, you don't fly because you can't."

If looks could kill, I'd be nothing but smoldering ashes.

"Or two," I continued, "you let me ride you and figure out how to use that fin. Until I can design a self-sustaining fin for you. Okay?"

He seemed far from pleased, but Toothless sighed in defeat and crouched down. He still looked extremely upset. I sidled over and gently took the saddle, dusting it off and placing it between his shoulders. Everything appeared to fit well.

Toothless grumbled to himself under his breath. I frowned. "Complain all you'd like. Until I can figure out how to make a tail you can control you're stuck with me directing you. You understand me, right bud?"

He gave me a look that clearly said, _No, really?_

"Yes, I totally love the sarcasm," I remarked. "Now, do you trust me enough to be your rider?"

I could tell he wasn't pleased, but he nodded towards his back. I sidled on gradually. We both took a few moments to adjust. This was a bit of a stretch for me; I wasn't exactly on the flexible side when it came to my groin. And I bet I wasn't exactly feather-light for Toothless. He trotted a bit and jumped, taking a few experimental beats with his wings to make sure my legs didn't hit them. They didn't.

His eyes met mine and he nodded. I breathed out slowly and took hold of the rope I'd attached to the fin.

"Okay, let's try this," I said.

He gave a screech and took off. I gasped but hung on with my knees, leaning forward in the saddle so I had my arms around his neck. Toothless continued up, then naturally descended, so his wings were outspread and stabilizing in the light breeze. I admit, I was terrified.

Yet it was exhilarating.

The way my heart fluttered and my hands shook were less obvious than the last time, but it was still there. My excitement was something I'd never felt in my life. This was something new and dangerous and fun all at the same time.

I took a deep, steadying breath and sat up in the saddle with the rope held high. Toothless went into a glide over the lake. I yanked the rope, expecting to turn right.

We went left with a shriek. Two splashes followed as Toothless and I hit the water at different intervals. I came up first, gasping. Then Toothless swam over to me. He came from under me so I was still in the saddle, then swam with me to land.

"Thanks bud," I said, patting his head.

He snuffed and nodded. Dumping me unceremoniously to the ground, Toothless proceeded to scorch the ground like the first evening I observed him. He settled down comfortably and shut his eyes.

"Better make myself a fire too," I decided.

I finally had to dry my notebook off for the second day in a row. This time I started a fire with nearby wood. I swore Toothless laughed at my pitiful fire.

"Laugh all you want," I said. "This is how humans do it. We don't breathe fire or anything fancy like you guys."

He rolled his eyes and went on with napping. Once my notebook and clothes were dry, I took a new pencil from my still-damp pocket and began scribbling down ideas for a more sturdy control.

"I'll need something for keeping me on the saddle. Yeah, rather not fly off again like today," I mumbled under my breath. "Hmmâ€|then there's the whole thing about controls. I can't go about with a simple rope again like today. Perhaps if there's a way to make the fin turn certain ways. A foot pedal? Maybe two? Hmmâ€|"

Berk: The Cove (Toothless's POV)

I woke up to the sound of scratching. Hiccup was still in the cove to my surprise. He didn't notice I was awake yet, so I took the time to study his behavior.

I watched as Hiccup sat with his back to a boulder. He was scribbling away with his black stick on the stuff he told me was paper. It was there that he was writing his sacred measurements. There were so many strange words he would unconsciously teach me. It was actually quite fascinating.

Apparently humans would make symbols with these sticks â€" I think he called it a charkhol? â€" that he would perform an action called reading with. This was a way of recording things that couldn't be remembered. Strange; dragon memory was, for the most part, impeccable. We almost never forgot anything.

There were some blurs in mine though. No other I'd spoken of this. Somehow I wished to share this with Hiccup. But would he understand.

I nudged his arm gently, as so not to jar his writing. Hiccup looked up and did the strange thing with his lips again. I could sense happiness. So was this how humans outwardly showed happiness?

"Hey bud. What's up?"

I snuffed and began to speak. Not with words and sounds like other primitive creatures, but through the mind with our soul connection. But I could tell it wasn't working.

Hiccup was sensing something; that much was there. He closed his papers and looked at me. "What is it? What are you trying to tell me?"

My memories. My memories.

I thought long and hard, but alas the bond was too weak! I could almost feel it shake unsteadily. Looks like telepathy really was beyond the capability of the narrow human mind.

I was about to give up, when suddenly I felt a spark run through my mind. It was nothing more than a glimmer really, but it was the same feeling I had at the initial bonding. The one where I could see him through his mind.

Hiccup must've felt it too. He gasped noticeably and over to me in shock. "Memories?"

So he heard! I nodded encouragingly. Hiccup stared at me for a long moment, before sighing. "Must be my imagination," he muttered.

I cuffed him on the back of the head with my tail.

"Ow! What was that for?"

For being too gullible.

"Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to be. It just happened." Hiccup ran a paw through his head-fur and groaned. "What in Odin's name am I even doing?"

_Why don't you stop rubbing your paw in your fur and go ask him? _I said snidely.

He glared at me. "Paw? What? No! This is called a hand. Not a paw, hand. It's much more complicated than a simple paw. Humans have opposable thumbs you know. And I can't just ask a god what I'm doing. Gods don't just drop down and answer the questions of any old person."

I rolled my eyes. _Just a suggestion. Don't get your hands in a knot about it._

"How would you get your hands in a knot anyway?"

Don't ask me.

"Then don't suggest it!"

Humans.

"Dragons." He sighed. "How crazy would everyone else think I am if they saw me? Here I am away from the rest of the Viking world and I'm talking to a dragon!"

And then the words sunk in for the both of us. Hiccup's eyes met mine and widened; and he began to laugh. "Oh gods, I'm talking to a dragon. That's it. I'm going mad. I knew it."

I tried to say more, to tell him that he wasn't going crazy and that he was actually hearing my voice, but I felt the bond loosen and vanish overall. Yet I was amazed. It was so strong for that moment and so natural that I didn't even have to think about it.

Perhaps I was overthinking it.

I looked back at Hiccup, who had recovered enough to go back to his writing with a new-found fury. Maybe I just had to let nature take its course. I couldn't force a bond on him, but I could let time strengthen what it had. Yes, his mind probably still needed time to adjust to being freed, opened.

So I decided to wait. I lay down beside my rider. His free right hand went to scratch behind my ears as he continued to write the strange symbols on the page.

In that moment, we were perfectly content. That moment was broken when he remembered that there were more measurements he had to take. Honestly, how many measurements did he have to perform?

Berk: The Cove (Hiccup's POV)

I had to leave eventually. I didn't really want to, but it's not like I had a choice. I still had an image to uphold. I stood and stretched. Gods, was it already this late? The sun was practically setting.

"I need to go," I said to Toothless. He watched me with sad eyes. "Hey, I don't wanna leave either bud. Especially with everything we've done today. Here, let me take the saddle."

I took off the leather. "Wasn't this uncomfortable?"

He almost shrugged.

"Okay thenâ€¦"

An awkward silence followed. I coughed lightly. "I'll get going. I have the day off tomorrow, so we can test out some new things I'll build tonight. And I promise to bring more fish."

Toothless seemed happy enough. His tail wagged a bit before he gave me a slobbery lick. Ugh. I wiped as much of his saliva off as I could with my sleeve and gave him a crooked smile. "See you tomorrow, bud!"

I dashed out, the saddle tucked under my arm. I half-ran half-sprinted back to the village. It was a chilly day so not too many people were out. Those who did see me ignored me as usual. I made it into my workshop without any suspicion.

I breathed a sigh of relief I didn't realize I was holding. Unbeknownst to most, I wasn't too comfortable after the initial success in the rink. It was the beginning of attention, and I knew it. No one would expect a hiccup like myself to be superior in anything related to dragons, even though I was the chief's son.

Thank goodness none of them knew about Toothless.

Making sure no one was looking I closed the window and the door in my workshop. Then I pulled the notebook out of my inner pocket. In it was a design to make a holding device for my saddle to keep me on. It started with a strap, but I eventually decided to make a riding vest with detachable hooks and rings. There was a rough sketch for a foot

pedal.

Then there was the entry I was writing that day. I pulled it out and read over my scrawl.

I don't understand exactly what happens, but sometimes I find that Toothless and I are more connected than just Viking and pet. I almost find I can communicate with him. I'm not sure if it's my overactive imagination or some divine force I'm not aware of, but there are moments where I speak to him and I can hear his reply. I'm not sure how to explain it; I form the words in my mind, but it's more like I sense his presence in my mind or something. It's complicated.

I smirked and turned away from that page. Complicated wasn't quite intense-enough of a word for exactly what the situation was.

I turned back to the sketches and measurements I made and sighed. Tonight was going to be a long night.

Just then there was a knock on my door. I sighed; could I not get any rest? Stashing the saddle in the box under my desk I answered the persistent fist. Ends up it was Gobber.

"Oh, hey Gobber. What's up?" I asked.

"Hiya Hiccup!" He smiled. "Just wanted to let ya know that the Gronkle was acting a wee bit up today, so I cancelled class. We'll make it up tomorrow."

"Ohâ€|okay? Will that be in the afternoon orâ€|?"

"When the sun peaks."

Okay. I'd have enough time to finish the extra things tonight and sleep. I could visit Toothless in the morning and late afternoon before class and dinner. I nodded. "Sounds good. So, I guess I'll see you tomorrow then?"

"See ya tomorrow!"

He closed the door as he left.

Okay, day off today.

. HTTYD

Turns out I was right. After another almost all-nighter, I was exhausted. But I made the saddle hooks and vest, so at least I wouldn't fall off. I also made a basic foot pedal for controls and finalized the tailfin. Then I got about four hours of sleep.

Somehow I managed to wake up and stumble to the woods with a pack of fish and my armload of leather materials. Toothless huffed at my arrival as I tripped over a rock and sent everything flying, falling brutally. Thankfully, he caught me.

"Thanks bud."

He huffed and rolled his eyes. Then he went off to eat. While he ate, I hooked up everything to him. Toothless complied by moving so I

could get the contraptions ready. Once set, I hopped onto his back and strapped myself in.

"Ready to try again?"

Toothless answered by taking off. This time I was ready for it. Sitting up, I tried the pedal. It worked enough to make us bank left. It didn't do much more than that.

I turned. The rope had gone slack; so I'd need to make a stabilizing connection to the fin. While I was distracted with the fin Toothless screeched a warning. We crashed with a cry on the top of the cliff right outside of the cove.

The landing was soft at least. I hopped off of Toothless only to see him completely content with the grass we had landed in. He didn't reply when I called him. The look on his face was of absolute content.

"So you like this grass, huh?"

Again, no response.

The grass grew practically everywhere. I took a clump of it and sniffed. It didn't seem much different from any other grass. Maybe my senses were duller than his? Shrugging, I pocketed some. I'd record it later.

It took a good long time to get Toothless out of the grass. By then, he was completely loopy and passed out by the lake. I saw it was time for me to leave.

"You probably can't hear me, bud, but I've gotta go. Class and all that. But I'll be back tonight to check on the fin controls. That means more measurements. Sorry." As an afterthought I added, "And I'll bring some more fish."

Then I dashed out of the cove. To class. And a whole lot happened after that.

* * *

><p>I hope that was to everyone's liking. Finally got a chance to sit down and finish this chapter! Especially Hiccup and Toothless through their first argument. I had way too much fun with that!

Everything about Pooka culture is made up. I did not base it on any other culture, just the one that came out of my head. If there are similarities to it from anywhere else in the world, I wasn't trying. That's all.

Enough from me. Until next time!

Sushi

9. Personal Nightmares Haunting

Hello again. I'm still alive!

* * *

><p>9 " Personal Nightmares Haunting

* * *

><p>Part I " The Guardians

Flemland (Jack's POV)

I shot straight down towards the glittering ocean, the wind howling in my ears. I watched as the cold hard sea became clearer and more menacing before my eyes. Others might've stopped or freaked out; I hooted at the top of my lungs and hit the water with a deafening splash.

Underwater was dark, but not terribly so. I could see up through the clear waters to the surface where sunlight was streaming in lazily. Taking my good time, I slowly floated up. When I did break the surface, I hopped lightly along. The wind carried me a few feet at a time, my feet freezing little sections as I went along.

The sunset was bright. No land was in sight, but everything was gorgeous. I even caught a glimpse of a pod of dolphins skimming along under the surface, occasionally breaking it as they soared up from the foaming sea. I floated above them for a good while. Watching them play and chatter so carefree was somehow therapeutic, and I knew I needed some serious happiness after the events of the last few days.

Baby Tooth fluttered over and settled on my shoulder. She twittered in my ear and pointed up to where Tooth was hovering, watching. I took the message and went to where she was.

"Glad to get off ship?" she asked.

I grinned widely. "Did you have to ask?"

We stayed there for a second, until I noted, "You're not wearing your new outfit."

"No, I'm not," Tooth stated, looking down at her usual dress of green-to-turquoise-to-purple. "It's not for today. I've got a duty, and this is work clothes for a reason."

That spiked my interest. "What, is your dress magical?"

She didn't answer. Instead she gestured for me to follow. Then Tooth began to fly up. I glanced at Baby. She shrugged and began to follow the larger fairy. So I did too. Passing Baby, I tucked her into my hood where she perched on my shoulder; I could feel her warm body humming against mine.

We flew above the clouds and towards the darkening indigo of the upper atmosphere. The moment we gained enough altitude, Tooth banked and began to fly away from the sunset, towards the distant stars. I shadowed her.

"Hey Tooth! Where're we headed?"

She replied, but the wind changed direction and swept away her answer. I let it be. I trusted Tooth, as hard as it was for me to trust just about anyone. The only people I trusted before this whole expedition was North and Sandy, and only because I had known them for years before.

If there was anyone who knew how to fly efficiently, it was Tooth. She whipped by my cruising speed without a hitch in her wing beat. I immediately picked up my pace so I was slightly ahead of her. Her violet eyes met mine and a smile lit up her face. She picked it up a notch. Then I did. Then she. Then me. Then her. We did this until land appeared beneath us. Then Tooth slowed her speed and fluttered down into a little village.

I came close behind her. We were both out of breath, more from exhilaration than fatigue. It was good to fly again. I laughed a bit.

"That was fun!"

"Yeah, it was!" Tooth caught her breath and giggled. "It's been a while since I've flown like that. Isn't that right, Baby?"

Baby Tooth poked her little head out of my hoodie, grumbling in her squeaky little voice. It seemed fainter than usual.

Tooth gasped and put her hands over her mouth. "Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't even think that the speed would be that awful!"

She huffed some more.

"Alright, alright, next time you won't ride in Jack's hood, okay?"

I chuckled. "Did I hurt Baby?"

"I think she might've been a bit shocked. It's not usual for fairies to have their wings restricted. It weakens us a bit when we can't fly, whether it's from being held or being injured."

Suddenly, I was concerned. Tooth must've noticed, because she hovered over and smiled in my face. "Don't worry. It's not that bad. Baby was only out of action for a few minutes. She'll be back on her wings in no time."

And it was true. Already the little fairy was tottering through the air. Unsteady, but getting better with every passing second.

"So where are we, exactly?" I asked.

"Flemland," Tooth replied. "It's time for me to get some work done."

I landed on a nearby roof Tooth had flown over to. She was perched lightly on the windowsill, looking into the room. I went down. "Didn't peg you as the peeping tom type."

She punched me lightly in the shoulder. "You could say the same to every other Guardianâ€¦except Bunny, probably. Our jobs to protect children sometimes require this. Especially with my job."

Then Tooth grabbed my hand and _slipped through the window_. Not like opening it and flying in, I mean really going through it. I gasped at the strange sensation of passing straight through the solid glass, my body overheating in a moment. When we were safely in, she let go of my hand. I instantly went cold again.

"Wasn't expecting that," I said after I regained my composure. "How'd you do that?"

"Part magic, part humming so fast that I could pass through solids. It took me a good ten years to master that little trick. That's when I started working."

"Really?" I asked, but my interest went unanswered. "So you didn't go straight from purpose to work then?"

Tooth laughed silently and put a finger on her pink lips for me to hush. Then she pointed to the corner. It was then that I realized we were in a kid's bedroom. It was decorated like any stereotypical room of a young boy: posters of sports stars and dinosaurs on blue walls, neutral carpet littered with toy cars and Legos. And in the corner Tooth was pointing to was a bed.

I went over to the bed. In it, of course, was a sleeping little boy. He was curled up under his covers. Probably dreaming, I thought, until I remembered there were no more dreams anymore. It made my smile vanish as quickly as it had come.

Tooth, on the other hand, was still happy. She flipped her fingers easily and to my amazement a coin appeared between them. She slipped the little coin under the pillow while removing her prize from beneath the boy's head.

"His ninth tooth," she stated. "Well brushed, though he's not much of a flosser. You can tell by the gums he has stuck on them!" Tooth giggled a little. "But this is his first incisor. Oh, how exciting!"

Tooth tucked the tooth away into her messenger bag. I was about to ask what she was going on about when Tooth grabbed my hand and I felt my body heating up again. We flew through the window and out of the town. Then she let go of my hand.

"I've decided it's about time I get back where children are," she said finally. "We were near enough to the coast for me to do work around here. We'll probably be making some rounds around here, Olanda, Frankkland, Suiss, and the Anglaria."

"So around," I concluded.

She shrugged. "We both could use a bit more fresh air. You went out with Sandy a lot, but the rest of us had work to do. North has the shipping business he still has to conduct, I've got my organizing, and Bunny's hunkering down for the winter you're planning to bring. He's trying to keep track of which flowers will bloom when. You could try to help him a bit there."

I nodded. "I might." Surprisingly enough, I actually meant it.

The rest of our trip passed in awkward silence. I emphasize awkward. From the little time I'd been around the Guardians, I caught on that Tooth was the chattiest of them. No surprise there; she's always full of energy. But this time was different. She remained solemn.

"Did I do something?" I asked after we went through a good hour's worth of houses. "You usually talk more."

"It's nothing." Tooth's eyes met mine. "Really, I'm just a bit lost in thought."

"Okay thenâ€¦"

We were sidling into the last house, for the sun was beginning to peak over the horizon again. By then, I was completely used to the strange feeling of heating up and flying through solid walls.

"Now how long did you say it's been since you last went out onto the field? Years?"

"A few hundred," she confirmed, "give or take a couple of decades. But like I said then, I don't regret it too much. I just really missed this."

When I gave her a blank look, Tooth continued, "Seeing their sleeping faces, knowing that the next day they'll wake up and look under their pillows to find a little coin or trinket. It's not worth much, but for them that's all they need. It's something so special, you know? And I'll definitely cherish it always."

Tooth looked at the sleeping girl, face clouded by some form of nostalgia. I laughed a bit. "Geez, you must really love kids and teeth to be able to do this for the rest of eternity."

"I do," she said with a shy shrug. "I think that's just one of the qualities we Guardians share. Once we find out purpose, we realize that's what we truly live for. Both before and after our immortality."

"I wish I knew what mine is," I blurted out before I could stop myself.

Tooth noticed and smiled. "I'm sure you'll find it soon. And I promise I'll do everything in my power to get your teeth back from Pitch."

I chuckled. "Don't worry about that. I'll take care of me, and Pitch while I'm at it."

She nodded. "Well, we should be getting back. It doesn't take that long for kids to wake up nowadays."

"Right."

We flew back to the ship in silence. For me, that silence was beyond silent. I'm no chatty Cathy, but I'm one to talk. After about ten minutes, I was done.

"Tooth?"

"Yes Jack?"

"Could you tell me a bit more about yourself? Unless you're not comfortable with it, I mean," I added quickly.

Toothiana remained silent for a bit. Then she laughed. "This was exactly what I was thinking about all night. Just how to tell my story right. It's long and boring. There's no action like Bunny's or heartbreak like Sandy's. I mean, it's a bit sad because I â€" you know â€" died and such."

"I don't care." I stopped her in midair by balancing on my staff, levitating before her. "I want to hear all about you and everyone else in the crew. Heck, I'd even listen to Phil if I could speak whatever it is those yetis speak!"

"Ancient Tibetan, with their accents," Tooth quipped promptly.

I frowned. "You all seriously say that the moment I try to joke about it."

"I'm sorry!"

"No no, it's cool. I'm used to it." I smiled. "So, what adventurous life did you lead to find the value of teeth?"

"Well, it was several hundreds of years ago. Sandy had just become a Guardian, and the reception of his becoming couldn't have been better. Pitch and his nightmares were at their peak of power, and Sandy was slowly defeating them alone."

"So he was flying solo for a time?" I asked.

"About fifty or so years, yes."

"That must've sucked."

"He's never said otherwise." Tooth pointed down. "There's a tooth."

"I thought we were done!"

"Just this one, I promise."

The trip was short. Another room, through the window and out again before the child so much as stirred. We were back at the ship by dawn.

I chuckled a bit. "Going on with you. So you were born around when Sandy was starting to become more known. Are the rumors true, that you were once a normal-looking fairy?"

"That is true," she confirmed. "I was born in the tropical country of Braziland to the name of Ana. I wasn't any different from anyone else there growing up. We played in the sun. We ate fruit. We were very laid-back."

"As I was growing up, I realized I wasn't like them. The other fairies. I liked to be busy and have something to do, not sit around all day and gossip. And fairies are notorious gossipers, let me tell

you!

"I got tired being in that environment for so long, so I left."

That was a bit shocker. "Hold up. You left?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

She didn't answer.

I wanted to ask more questions, but Tooth excused herself. Something about going back to her place to finish filing all the teeth we collected that night. I didn't stop her and she went on her way.

North came over to me. His heavy hand clasped my shoulder. "Did you have good night?"

"I guessâ€|"

"What troubles you, Jack?"

Leave it to North to always come when I'm conflicted over things. I turned to meet his eyes. "I've noticed Tooth is really really closed off about herself. I asked her about her past, and she seemed to try and â€" I don't know â€" distance herself from it. I couldn't get a straight answer out of her. And I'm not sure."

North nodded. "Perhaps you should leave it at that."

"I probably should. Butâ€|"

"Curious about it now, yes?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I could tell you a little about Tooth. But only little bit. It is her story to tell." North gestured to the stirring wheel. "Come. Sit down, and I'll tell you more about fairies."

He went and stood behind the great wooden wheel, hands replacing those of a yeti (I think it was Robb) who immediately vanished below decks. It took me until then to realize that the yetis worked shifts with North so they could all rest and steer to Berk. That, and to give North time to keep track of the shipping business he ran. I noticed his sleigh vanish at least once a day when he left for work.

I greeted Roxy as we passed by her. The dragon gave me a mistrusting look. No doubt she recognized me as the one who shot her down and killed her wing. I just hoped it would get better.

The controls were a confusing mismatching series of levers and buttons. There was a control pad under the wheel that had even more buttons on it, as well as a telephone connected. I knew two of the levers controlled the anchors, one the altitude change, but that was about it. The telephone connected North with Santoff Claussen in case anyone (or any-yeti) had an emergency call to make.

I sat on the railing nearby as North checked his compass, adjusting our course slightly. "So what can you tell me about fairy culture that would help me understand where Tooth is coming from?"

"Yes, let us start. Tooth came from Braziland."

"She told me that bit. That, and that she ran away from home. That's it."

North nodded. He thought for a moment before replying. "It is hard thing, fairy culture. There are many rules and they are very strict, and those who cannot follow them are outcasted. Tooth was pressured to leave because she was very different."

"That's horrible!"

"But it was for best. Fairies still have Elder women in many villages. Only those chosen " meant to be " Elders at birth would become humanlike. That is why Tooth is as big as us and looks so human. She was one of five. One from each great fairy species.

"Tooth was very different from start. She had a habit to work on things no one else cared as passionately about. Every single day, without fail, Tooth would record everything she had done. She had such an amazing memory that she remembered full conversations she had with other fairies."

"That's amazing!" I blurted out. "I mean, c'mon. Photo memory! People would die for that sort of thing."

"Yes, it is true. But for Tooth, it came with price. She could not forget anything. That was why she left. Life with her people became too repetitive. She wanted to do something new.

"It was while Tooth was travelling that she became who she is today. I do not know details of transformation, but I heard it was very painful. When she came back home, though, she was treated like royalty. And she hated it so much."

I nodded, egging North on, but he stopped.

"It is all I can tell you. The rest is up to Tooth. This is her story, not mine."

Disappointment is not something I mask well. North could tell immediately I wasn't happy with his response. He admitted defeat.

"I will answer one question about Tooth. Just one."

"Okay then—how did she die?"

"—Perhaps a different question—"

"Okay—" I thought for a minute or so. "Right, got one! Why does Tooth wear her dress even though she makes new outfits? Is it because her dress is magical?"

North beamed. "That is good question, Jack."

"Thanks. Can you answer it by chance?"

"Yes, I think so. I will start with after she was resurrected by Manny. Every feather Tooth lost was after her transformation. Before that, she had all of her feathers like the other fairies. But she woke naked.

"Each feather she lost became one of her ladies. That is why they all look the same, but are all slightly different. But because they had been her feathers.

"Now, she had no clothes to cover herself with. So her gown is actually something each of her ladies gave her to swear to sacred duty of collecting memories. They gave up their own memories to create her dress."

I interrupted. "Now I'm confused. I thought the ladies were part of Tooth. You just said they were born from her feathers!"

"Exactly." When I gave him a blank look North asked me, "Don't you see, Jack? Tooth gave up her own memories for her duties. That is why she did not tell you much about her past. She cannot remember it unless she wears her dress."

That was beyond deep. I took a slow breath, digesting the bulk of it. Tooth knew how I felt. She understood what it was like not to remember the past. She understood what it was like. I wasn't the only one. Granted, she had immediate access to her memories, but they were still not a part of her being.

"Wow," I managed. "I can't imagine all for her purpose, her center?"

"Yes. It was her ultimate sacrifice. Now Tooth can only remember the children and their teeth perfectly."

At that exact moment Robb came back up with two plates of bacon and eggs. Maddie followed with waffles and hot chocolate. And some sugar cookies. Oh right, it was breakfast time. I'd totally forgotten.

North pressed a button on the control pad and " to my amazement " a table came out of the ship's floor. The yetis placed the food on the table and left. The big man began to eat, gesturing me to do so. I had a waffle that was practically oozing maple syrup, then froze my hot chocolate and took a sip. Mmm, icy.

"Did that answer some of your questions?" North asked after a while.

I nodded. "A bit. I won't push Tooth about her past. She'll tell me like everyone else did. Like you did all those years ago when you first caught me trying to break in!"

"Ah yes." The Russki smiled knowingly. "You reminded me of me when I was little boy. So full of curiosity and mischief. I had to tell you all about me."

I scoffed. "You were crazy as a kid!"

"You are still crazy!"

We laughed. It was good to laugh again, for real. I managed to stop long enough to finish my hot-cold chocolate without much of a problem. "Thanks for everything, North."

"Of course. You will be Guardian soon. We are all here to help you."

I stood up. "I think I'll take a nap. Maybe I'll go out with Tooth again tonight."

"You do that." North watched me go, a strange mix of pride and worry etched on his face. I didn't blame him. He was the closest thing I had to a parent for my entire immortal existence. He probably felt slightly responsible for my wellbeing. And I honestly wasn't surprised by that.

When I collapsed on my bed I was out like a light until Baby Tooth came in to wake me at sundown.

Angleria (Jack's POV)

The night started off silent again. I followed Tooth to the mainland, Baby flying close behind. We went through some walls, collected some teeth, and went on with life. Finally, I was so sick of the silence.

"Tooth," I said, "I asked North about your past today."

She froze. Not a good sign. After a long moment, she asked, "What did he tell you?"

"Nothing much, just about fairy culture and the significance of your dress." When she didn't reply I continued. "I wanted to ask more, but North told me it was best that you tell me yourself because it's your story, not his. Besides, I know all about him!"

Tooth smiled a bit. "I will tell you someday Jackâ€¦ just not yet. Not tonight."

I shrugged. "I've waited three hundred years for my purpose. I think I can manage a few nights of dying curiosity peachily."

"Is that even a word?"

"It is now!"

That got a real laugh out of her. Tooth fluttered over to me. "Aw, thank you Jack. That really means a lot to me!"

"So your dressâ€¦"

"Yes. All of my memories make up the threads. I try to wear it when I'm out and about. It reminds me exactly what I gave to be a Guardian. And like I've said countless times, I don't regret a thing. My decision was my choice as much as the Man in the Moon's and I know I made the right one." She nodded solemnly. "I sometimes look back and think, 'What if I didn't choose this as my life?'"

"And?"

"I couldn't imagine it! My purpose defines me as much as I define it! It's everything I ever lived for!"

I could feel the tension between us dissolving. I relaxed for the first time that day. It was good to have Tooth back, chatty and all. We began to talk again about pointless little nothings for the rest of the night. Finally, I could see daybreak on the fringe of the horizon.

"Looks like we'll be heading back soon," I said.

Tooth nodded. "Seems so." She sighed sadly. "It still doesn't seem right."

"What doesn't seem right?"

"To know that Sandy isn't out there weaving dreams for all the children in the world. How can we possibly bring them all joy? Christmas isn't for a while. Neither is Easter. And I can only do so much!" Tooth sniffled a little. "I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have brought up such a touchy topic."

I shook my head. "No, you're fine. We're all still grieving. Trust me, I still am."

And I want revenge. We'll figure something out, I thought to myself. And we'll make Pitch pay for what he's done while we're at it.

Then I began to think of all the nights I spent out with Sandy. It had been about five days, but I felt like I knew more about him than any other Guardian, and he couldn't even speak! The more I thought, the more I remembered about his center. About the kids he guarded. About a specific kid.

"Tooth?" I asked. "Can I ask you a favor?"

She looked up. "Of course! Though whether I'll let you or not is the question."

I smiled back. "It's not much, but I was wondering if you could let me fly over to New Amsterdam for a few minutes. Alone. I know it's against ship rules, to let me out on my own, but there's something I have to do. Can you trust me with that?"

Tooth gave me a sad smile, then glomped me. "Go ahead. But not too long. I don't want everyone to start asking questions."

"Thanks Tooth." I hugged her carefully, making sure not to touch her wings after what I'd learned, and flew off. I could feel her watching me go.

New Amsterdam: The Slums (Jack's POV)

I found myself floating in front of the window, staring at the kid. He was in the corner again, obviously having an uneasy time sleeping. Every so often, a sniffle made its way to my ears. The sight was

pitiful. It almost broke my heart. The window frosted over as I thought of it.

Just another child unable to find peace.

Baby Tooth tugged at my sleeve, her eyes questioning. I sighed. "I don't know why I came back, but I couldn't help but remember how Sandy helped him through the rough days. He's not a bad kid, but I'm worried without Sandy he won't be saved, you know?"

She nodded solemnly. Then she cocked her head to the side, asking what I was going to do.

My cheeky grin returned. "I'm going to give him a day away from all this."

Flying straight up into the coldest part of the sky, I called the wind. Egging it on, there was soon an isolated pocket of cold moving straight towards the warm above New Amsterdam. A massive storm was on the way, but not bad enough to keep a playful kid indoors. Oh no, he was going to love this!

It was almost morning, give or take a couple of hours. Before long, the people of the city would be enjoying a day of absolute chaos. And I knew the kids would be out throwing snowballs and skating along frozen sidewalks. And I was already laughing at the thought.

"SNOW DAY!" I whooped before whizzing back to the ship.

Best. Day. Ever.

* * *

><p>Part II â€" The Vikings

Berk: Dragon Training Arena (Hiccup's POV)

I was staring at the grass in my hand, still unsure what to make of it. Something about it had made Toothless completely lose his sanity. I'd heard of an action like it before from some southern traders once; they called it being 'high', or 'drugged'. Either way, it matched the description perfectly.

I sniffed it again, then chewed some. It didn't affect me at all. The grass smelled and tasted like any other. And I had a lot of experience from childhood bullying. What? The others did make me eat dirt on more than one occasion!

Hearing a shout, I looked up. Looked like Gobber had started the fight without me. Already Ruffnut was nowhere to be seen, Tuff was running out of the ring, Fishlegs was playing dead (though I could see him breathing), while Snotlout was trying and failing once again to hit on Astrid, who was actually doing something useful.

She laid a solid hit on the Gronckle's head until it knocked her away and came barreling towards me. Which I hadn't been expecting. I was so unexpecting that I didn't even have a weapon in my hand. Only the grass. So I made a quick prayer and held the grass out towards its snout.

Surprisingly, that did the trick. The Gronckle stopped; I heard the hum of its wings die away. I peeked a glance over to find its pupils blown up as it sniffed the contents of my hand. I couldn't help but laugh a bit. The whole scene was quite comical really; the Gronckle was quite cute like this. I rubbed the grass against its snout for good measure, watching in awe as it rolled onto its side with its tongue lolling out of its mouth.

"Oh wow," I murmured out loud, grinning from ear to ear. I needed to make note of this â€" Gronckles were also affected like the Night Fury with this grass, but much more. I reached for my notebook only to be stopped by a heavy hand on my shoulder. I turned around.

Gobber was grinning down at me. "Well done Hiccup. Never seen a dragon do that!" Then to the rest of the class he shouted, "That's it. See you all at dinner!"

I pulled out my notebook and wrote the last fact quickly before storing the precious thing and heading out. If I hadn't been so preoccupied by the whole endeavor, I probably would've noticed the increase of villagers there, or the village elder watching me thoughtfully, or the impressed looks my fellow peers gave me, or the glares Astrid was. But I didn't. Instead, I headed towards the bridge that lead out of the village towards Raven's Point. I still had almost a full afternoon to spend time with Toothless.

It took me a minute to realize that everyone was following me. When I turned around, they were there, questions and comments practically spewing out of their mouths.

"How did you manage to do that?"

"That was amazing!"

"Gods, how did you do that?"

"Not so useless anymore are ya, Hiccup?"

"I've never seen a Gronckle do that?"

I needed to get away from them. "Uh, guys, I think I left myâ€¦um, axe, in the rink. So, um, yeah! I'll, um, I'll see you guys later then! Okay, bye!"

I ran as fast as I could back to the village, leaving them all behind. There was only one way out of the village and that was the bridge. Unless I could sneak a boat under it to the other shore, but I definitely could try.

The sprint back sent me flying straight through the door of my workshop to grab everything Toothless needed, shoved in a basket I slung over my shoulder. Next stop was the port, where I managed to steal a second basket of fish. See, no one notices Hiccup the Still-Pretty-Much-Useless.

Taking a raft I'd made a few years back â€" with a pedaling mechanism for a makeshift thing I decided to call a rudder â€" and angled it towards the opposite shore. Then I headed towards the shore.

Berk: The Cove (Hiccup's POV)

"Hey bud, sorry it took so long!"

Toothless looked at me and huffed a bit. Okay, maybe he wasn't as glad to see me as I was him. I sighed and set the basket of fish before him.

You're late!

"Look, I'm really sorry I have to keep running off, but I'm still a Viking going through dragon training." He refused to look at me, so I sat down next to him and continued, "If it weren't for you, I'd probably died at the flames of a Gronckle by now!"

He eyed me indignantly. I could sense his bewildered, smug grin.

"What?" I chided indignantly.

Toothless seemed to laugh. _A Gronckle? Really? Those things are dumber than stone!_

"Well excuse me for not being a superior being like a Night Fury or something," I argued back. "Unlike you, I don't have any natural defenses except my wits and the fact that I'm so puny no dragon in their right mind would waste their time hunting me."

Toothless looked me up and down, eyes narrowing, and snorting. _Good point. You may be intelligent, but you really don't look like much fun when it comes to a good hunt._

"Thank you," I sighed until his words registered. "Hey! That wasn't very nice!"

_You started it. _He rolled his eyes and began to eat the fish before him.

I groaned and pulled my bangs out of my eyes with a hand in frustration. Of course I had to end up with the snarkiest being I'd ever met in my life. Gods help me. And then it hit me again that I was indeed speaking and understanding Toothless perfectly.

"We were talking again just now, weren't we?" I asked him.

Toothless looked up mid-swallow, his expression one of shock. It obviously hadn't hit him until I'd pointed it out. He looked at me expectantly, then shook his head and continued to eat with a snuff. So I couldn't talk to him anymore.

"Well, anyway, that grass that had you completely loopy earlier practically knocked the Gronckle out. Who knew some grass could do that!" I smiled. "That stuff doesn't seem different from any other grass to me, aside from the fact that it's greener and has some sort of juice in it. It obviously smells different to dragons, so I guess being human is the disadvantage here. I bet we can't smell the same things as you guys."

I picked up a fish and began to gut it absentmindedly. Ever since I'd come to earn Toothless's trust, I'd started carrying a dagger again.

"We're the weirdest people in the weirdest relation I know. Well, except that you're not a person, you're a dragon, but still. And despite all that, we're making it work so far. Can you agree with that?"

Instead of replying, he shot the ground at my feet with a flame, hardening the dirt into a perfect grill. I whittled a point into a nearby stick, speared my fish, and began roasting it. No, it looks like Toothless didn't need to answer. We were fine. I just hoped we would be for a while longer.

Lunch passed in silence. I finished a good while after Toothless, who practically inhaled the fish I'd gotten him. It made me wonder exactly how much he ate. Perhaps I could ask him someday, and get an answer.

"You know," I said as I threw away the last of the bones from my fish, "I'm surprised I'm not completely flipping out. Whatever it is that makes me understand you is beyond me, but I would normally have run or something. But it's something I can't ignore."

He remained silent, dark eyes watching me. I stretched and continued. "It's the little things. I'm not usually good at speaking. I've been a listener all my life. I guess it's because I'm just Hiccup. The mistake."

Toothless cocked his head to one side. A question I didn't need words to understand.

"When I was born, I was so small that no one believed I would make it past the first year. I was also born early, during the spring months, when I wasn't due until the summer. Yet my dad used to tell me all the time it was my mother's love that kept me alive. She refused to give up on me.

"As you can see, I lived. Wasn't much of a feat, though. I can tell a lot of people think my parents made a mistake when they put forth the utmost effort into me and not making another more formidable, Viking-like child."

Why?

I sighed. "Through my early childhood, everyone could tell I was different. I didn't grow much. I was sickly, always in bed because of some illness. I almost died twice of fever, only to miraculously get better. And I loved to explore.

"We Vikings are simple people. We don't know anything called creativity or curiosity unless it's relevant to preserving our culture or making food taste slightly better. Which is rare." I smiled. "That, and killing dragons. And I was bad at all three.

"And the weirdest part about me was that I thought too much." That obviously confused Toothless (I couldn't read his mind, but I could tell he was puzzled, somehow). I explained. "Well, I could read my letters at a young age, for starters. Probably because I wasn't able to go out and stuck my nose in books instead. It's rare that Vikings read unless they're forced to. I did it voluntarily.

"I daydreamed constantly. Sometimes others would have to say my name

two or three times until I noticed they were talking to me, then they'd go through the trouble of repeating what they were trying to tell me initially. Even now, I'm usually writing down new ideas for inventions I've got. No one supports them, but most of them have worked in one way or another.

"Then there was the fact that I had to have proof. I remember once that Dad took me out fishing. He sat there without a care in the world. And I got so bored I went looking for trolls. Then I fell in a dark hole in a cave." I frowned at the memory. "I don't remember how I got out, though..."

"Anyway, I also sucked at fighting. Couldn't use a bow and arrow, couldn't wield a sword, couldn't swing a hammer, couldn't lift an axe, couldn't hold a shield correctly. Then Dad figured out I was left-handed. Oh the shame that brought." I laughed hollowly. "In case you didn't know, most humans are right-handed. We do everything with our dominant hand. But everything for me was backwards. And I was so stubborn that the villagers gave up teaching me how to be right-handed."

Toothless sniffed my hand suspiciously. I laughed for real. "It's not like there's anything different with my hands! No one knows why I became like this! I'm a curiosity among all Vikings everywhere!"

He rolled his eyes. _Obviously._

"Because I befriended a dragon?" I asked.

Exactly.

"Well, there's a first for everything. Just like I'm the first Viking who couldn't kill a dragon." I thought about it for a few seconds. "I don't mind anymore."

And I realized how true that was. I could pass for now as a good initiate to dragon training, but it's not like anyone actually has to kill a dragon to be there. You just had to be a Viking. Which I was.

Toothless stood up and nudged me onto my feet. "What is it, bud?"

He glanced at the prosthetic fin (still bundled so other Vikings wouldn't see it) and looked at me pointedly. I understood immediately.

"Fine, but I'll need some measurements first."

He grumbled something I couldn't understand, but settled at my feet complying. I took the length of rope I used to measure from the pile, notebook from my vest pocket, and started writing down every possible part of Toothless's anatomy I could.

Wingspan, tail length, distance between shoulder blades, thickness of legs, length of eyes, snout to tip-of-tail, everything. By the time I was done it was almost nightfall. Much to both of our dismays, we hadn't been able to get into the air.

"Right." I stretched and pocketed my materials. "I'll finish my designs tonight. That way we can have a better control pedal. We'll

start testing it out tomorrow. Okay?"

Toothless nodded. I smiled again, and left.

* * *

><p>North of Berk: The Volcano

He had only lost one. Pitch did not see that as much of a problem, considering that thousands of dragons had been killed since he'd first set foot on the island of Berk. Still, he knew the Queen would be upset. He wouldn't mention the missing Gronckle for the time being.

Sighing, the Nightmare King stretched and settled to the shadows he usually lounged in. He wasn't tired â€" far from it in fact â€" but he was deep in thought. He was determined to separate Jack Frost from the Guardians, but it wouldn't be easy. Just the distress from the Sandman's death had proved that to him.

Yet the sheer power it was evident Jack possessed drew in Pitch. He was intrigued. If Jack Frost was given that much potential from the Man in the Moon, then there had to be a reason. Pitch didn't want to find out what that reason could be.

Besides, he had more pressing matters.

As if on cue, he heard the summon, **_**Boogeyman.**_**

Pitch sighed. He found that the Dragoness always greeted him like this, with little to no respect as if he were just another one of her mindless puppets. But he bit back his annoyance. She was just a ticket to power.

"Yes, your highness?" he asked smoothly.

He caught a glimpse of her snout from the smoky chasm, but nothing more. **_**I just received word from one of the Terrors I sent out to find your beast. It seems as though the thing has attempted to make a soul bondâ€¦with a human.**_**

Even Pitch hadn't been expecting that. His composure broke slightly. "The Night Furyâ€¦and a human? What do we know about this human?"

He is a boy, and still young, perhaps the state between childhood and adulthood. That is all we have been able to gather. ****She sighed. **_**I'm sure you understand my concerns.**_**

"Indeed." Pitch thought for a moment, then smiled. "Well, it shouldn't be too hard to distress the children of the world. That will weaken the Guardians. I could manipulate the human the beast has made a soul bond with, if he has indeed done that."

How do you figure?****

"If he is a teenager, it should be quite simple. His life is probably in chaos at that age, for that is when a human is most unstable mentally and subconsciously. If I could infiltrate his dreams with nightmares-"

**Then we can slowly make him fall,** continued the Green Death.

"and eventually break the soul bond," finished Pitch.

He could feel the tension and fear in the air slowly dissolve. For once, that was a welcoming feeling for Pitch. He addressed the dragon queen again. "Did this Terror tell you where we could locate the missing Night Fury?"

**He did,** she replied. _**The cove a little past Raven's Peak. I will have him lead you there. Terror!**_

The dragon slunk out from behind a rock. _You called, my lady?_

**Indeed. Show this Boogeyman the location of the beast.**

"There will be no need of that, you graciousness," Pitch said with false honey in his voice. The Terror slunk away as he dismissed it with the wave of a hand.

**Oh? Why ever not?** she asked.

"I know the general location. I'll go there myself if I must, but not now. I have control of all the dream sand once again. I should have no problem with causing a bit of misery and fear."

**You have the sand in your control?** The Green Death seemed quite impressed. _**How did this happen?**_

"Oh, it was simple really. Just a little something I like to call the power of fear. It can be quite amazing sometimes, can't it?"

**Yes, yes it can. And the children here do prove it so well.**

The two turned to glance at a large tunnel-like cave where hundreds of pairs of terrified eyes watched, glittering within their own horrors as the nightmares slowly consumed them again.

* * *

><p>Wow, I can't believe I was out for a month! So sorry (as always). Life just caught up with me and I didn't have any time to write long chapters. And I didn't want to post something I didn't consider of a higher quality.

I'm having so much fun with this story now it's not even comprehensible at times. Thanks for sticking through with me. Comments make me happy as long as they're not flames. I did get one flame last month calling me a "pea brained moron" because I said "Southarctica" instead of "Antarctica," but who cares, eh?

_I even appreciate the constructive stuff because that means that you guys are willing to give your honest opinions to help me become a better writer. _

_Now that play's over, I have my writing time back, so we'll see when

I'll get around to the next chappie._

Well then, until I have time to write the next installment!

-Sushi

10. Secrets

Hey peoples! Boy oh boy, have I been busy!

Went to a fabulous Gay Pride Gala the other day with my friend, auditioned for a youth orchestra, and attended my last Russian class for the semester! I don't know if I'm sad or relieved that it's over. And then there was prom! And I've got so much homework (end of year crunch and stuff)â€|

And it's finally warm and sunny where I reside (about time too!) so I've been enjoying the great outdoors instead of writing. But it was cold yesterday and will be today and tomorrow so here I am!

Sorry if I took too long for some peoples' likings (like you, ClearBear; but I appreciate your reviews and enthusiasm, so kudos for that)

\\(^o^)/

Enough blabbing from me! Without further ado, I present to all Chapter 10! Happy reading!

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><p>10 â€" Secrets

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><p>Part I â€" The Guardians

Aurora Borealis: Somewhere over the Sea (Jack's POV)

Phil found me that morning asleep on the deck. He shook me awake, eyes questioning.

"Yeah, long night," I murmured sleepily.

Phil nodded and took me to where the others were having breakfast below decks. North and Bunny were in the midst of having a spat over which holiday was better (Christmas or Easter). Tooth hadn't returned yet. Sandy's seat was looming empty. The yetis were talking away, passing bowls of oatmeal around.

I absentmindedly grabbed a sugar cookie from a passing elf. Yes, those little idiots were still hanging around. A few always managed to find a way onto North's sleigh whenever he went back to Santoff Claussen. Annoying? Yes. Damn good cookies? Of course!

Finishing my cookie within a minute, I excused myself. No one noticed me depart.

I spent a good half of my day reading a book. Hey, don't judge! I do read! Not too often (cuz I'm out causing trouble and making snow and stuff) but being on boat arrest for an indefinite amount of time isn't exactly that lenient. It's lost its fun to prank Bunny.

Speaking of whichâ€¦

I heard his paws making their way across the hall. Well, it was better than talking to no one.

Tossing the book aside, I slammed my door open. It shocked Bunny, who jumpedâ€”and knocked his head on the low ceiling; I know, hilarious. After rubbing his bruised skull, he glared at me. I raised an eyebrow in return. He nodded coolly.

"Frostbite."

"Eucalyptus," I replied with a smirk.

As I expected, Bunnymund's eyes narrowed. He took a step towards me. "I though everyone here was in agreeance that no one would refer to me by my first name."

"Really? I'd never heard that in the ship's agreement."

"But my formal title is 'E. Aster.' I've told everyone that, including you, and just about everyone's remembered that by now."

"I'm not exactly 'everyone' now, am I?"

"Watch it, boyo."

"Whatever you say, Kangaroo."

Bunny looked ready to retaliate, but stopped and groaned.

I went to steady him. Come to think of it, he hadn't been looking all too healthy for a while. "You okay there?"

"I need a break from this bloody ship," muttered Bunny. "I want â€”no, need â€” ta feel the earth beneath my feet again."

"Need a lift?" I asked.

He seemed a bit surprised by the offer. "If you insist. And, if you behave, I might let'cha see the Warren like I promised."

"Seriously? You would?"

Bunny shrugged. "I promised I would someday, didn't I?"

I grinned from ear to ear. "Let's go then!"

"As long as you don't destroy anything."

"Please, since when have I destroyed your things?" When he gave me a glare, my smile withered slightly. "Okay, fine. When have I destroyed your things in the last few months?"

"You're really pushing my buttons here, Frostbite," he warned.

"I was trying to be honest. I haven't destroyed Easter for a good two or so years now."

"Yeah, and don't get cocky because North offered you a clean slate with the Naughty list. If I were him, I'd be itching to land a punch on you."

I sighed. "Do you want to go back on land or not?"

Bunny hesitated, obviously hating the fact that I was his only ride back down to earth. "I'll take the ride, but only if you promise not to kill me on the way there."

"You're immortal."

"You know what I mean."

"And I don't make promises that I don't mean, or can't keep."

"Frost--"

"Come on!"

I ran up onto the deck. Bunny followed unsteadily behind. At least he followed. I took it as a promising sign and held out a hand. He took it gingerly.

"Here, stand on the crook of my staff," I commanded, "and hold on tight."

His grip threatened to shatter every bone in my hand. I rolled my eyes at his fear (though secretly enjoying it) and called the wind.

"Wind! Get me down to the nearest piece of land! And fast!"

Fast it was. Don't feel too bad; Bunny got his revenge after throwing up in a bush. I didn't enjoy the rough ride to the Warren. I even hit my head on a rock.

Bunny seemed pretty happy about my obvious misery. He hauled me up to my feet and mock-bowed. "Welcome to the Warren. A little caution if ya don't mind. My Warren, my rules."

"Gee, more rules. Thanks," I said snidely, but my sarcasm soon left as I saw the place unfold before my very eyes.

The Warren (Jack's POV)

The Warren was sunny. Obviously underground, but sunny. Something about that seemed more natural. Thick, soft grass carpeted the ground underneath my feet. It too was warm with an earthy scent.

Several strange, golem-like creatures marched around. I realized with a start that they were giant stone eggs, seven or so feet tall with faces carved into them, moss growing leisurely on their surfaces. I

stroked one; its body was rough and soft to the touch.

"They keep guard of my googies," Bunny explained as I took an interest in them.

I found his lingo mildly amusing. "Googies?"

"What? I am an Auslandian native last I checked!"

"Last you checked." I smirked and tapped another passing guard. "Really, though? They're guards. Seem pretty chill to me."

"Ah, but that's because you're not on their bad side, mate. And I mean that literally."

He pointed to the back of the passing egg golem as it thudded by. There was a second face etched in, an evil frown staring at us. Okay, I didn't want to be on their bad side. Sure I'm immortal, but I can still suffer.

I turned and noticed Bunny beginning to walk down a path lined with trees and flowers. He beckoned for me to follow. "I'll give ya the grand tour of the place. If you'd like, that is."

"You kidding me? Of course!"

I dashed after the pooka cautiously. I didn't think Bunny'd take it too well if I accidentally knocked one of his plants with my elbow or staff or something and freeze it over.

We went through the Warren backwards. Bunny explained each landmark briefly (emphasis on brief; in fact, tag on a 'ridiculously' with it). We were through the entire place in less than ten minutes which, for once, didn't sit well with me.

"That was way too quick," I stated.

He seemed a bit irked by my complaint. "I told you I'd show you my Warren, not dissect the whole thing! Besides, when have you cared about the inner workings of Easter?"

"Now?"

"Please? I'm actually curious as to how you manage to get Easter together without the help of others. I mean, even North's got the yetis and the elves, I guess."

That made Bunny smile. "It's because I've got magic on my side, bucco. Fine, I'll show you with this thing." He pulled out a wooden egg from his pocket. "Now follow me. I'll start with the basics."

Bunny led me to a meadow. Everything with this kangaroo seemed to lead to a meadow. This open field, though, was very different from the one he'd shown me in Auslandia. The flowers here were magentas and yellows and whites, blooming happily unlike the morbid red grave markers. The grass here was slightly longer, covering my ankles. It frosted over as I treaded lightly through it.

The most noticeable thing there were a specific flower I'd never seen

before. They looked like bluebells, except the stem was up to my waist and each flower was the size of my fist. The flowers were still shut tightly. As for the petals, they were cream colored and almost translucent. I could just make out the outline of something growing in the flower itself.

Bunny put a hand under one flower. "This here is where the egg grows. They mature over the whole year and are all born the day before Easter."

Then his hand glowed slightly until I could make out the outline of the egg quite clearly. The top of it was attached to the stalk like an umbilical cord. And then I realized it was Bunny's hand and not his paw. Looking up, my eyes confirmed my assumption.

"So you're human now?"

"In the form of one, yes."

I met his gaze, curious. Then the torrent of questions came spewing out of my mouth. "Why do you transform anyway? Is there a difference between the two forms with abilities or something? And is that all you can transform to? Are you still considered a Pooka if you're in your human form? And how did you make your hand glow like that? Oh, and where did the pants come from? Seriously, I want to know."

"One question at a time, Frostbite! Geez!" He laughed a bit.

"Alright, I'll get them all down. First off, I'm a Pooka no matter what I look like. And yes, I can only transform between human and rabbit. Secondly, there are differences. My hand can glow because I'm in my human form. Magic runs stronger in a Pooka's human identity, but we're faster and stronger as rabbits. Which is why I tend to stay like that. Anyway, Pookas have some abilities in magic if we're close to earth. I've got years of experience with that li'l trick. Usually, though, we specialize in healing and growing plants. Earth magic is often considered healing magic too; they go hand in hand.

"And why do you keep asking about my bloody pants? What is so amazing about them?"

"Curious," I responded with a shrug, but inside I was ready to burst with laughter.

"Right!" Bunny clasped his hands together. "I guess I'll run you through the basics with this wooden egg. Not the same, but it'll do."

He released the egg gently to the ground. It sprouted little feet and began walking towards the paint river. I gasped and watched it toddle its way over. "Is this how you do the Easter thing without having to paint them all on your own?"

"Yep. These googies know exactly what they're doing. Programmed by magic and everything. There's a bunch of complicated stuff involved, but that's not so bad once you manage it. And like I said earlier, I'm more attuned to earth magic to begin with, so I can manipulate anything natural."

"Like eggs?"

"Like eggs."

The wooden egg hopped over the grass and dashed down the hill, jumping feet first into the swirl of colors. It vanished from sight for a few seconds, but soon reemerged on the other side of the river. I half expected it to be a mess of colors, but saw it was a robin blue.

"Don't the paints get mixed up?" I asked.

"Naw." Bunny came over to me. I noticed he was a bunny again. "The paint has random selection. That's why each egg is different. Usually those with the same colors will go to the same place. So all the pink ones will want to travel together, or the yellow ones, and so on and so forth."

I grinned. "That sounded so racist."

"Did it now?"

Bunny was about to say more, but I ignored him and continued to follow the egg. It had slid onto a spiral vine now. As it slid down, Bunny explained, "That there is where some of the eggs get their designs. Many don't. But the ones that do have the most intricate things."

Sure enough, the egg now had a silver-and-gold swirling pattern going up diagonally. It resembled a henna I'd seen some years ago. Bunny picked up the completed egg and its legs vanished. He reached into his pouch and pulled out a paintbrush. Right away I could tell this one was magical; the paint on the tip was a perfect line and it kept changing colors.

Bunny took a seat on a rock under a shady tree, adding a new pattern to the egg. I joined him after a moment.

"Do you deliver completed eggs, or is there something else?"

Bunny shook his head, eyes never leaving the blue-painted wood. "Normally the real ones would go through those tunnels there and hide themselves. Then they'd lose the legs."

"Wowâ€¦" I was actually impressed. "Not bad."

"Not bad yourself."

"Sorry about all of the Easter blizzards."

"You're forgiven, as long as you promise not to have any more of those things."

"Promise."

He seemed a bit shocked by it. "Really?"

"Yeah," I said, "really."

We shared a smile for a moment. I took some time to look around the Warren from where I sat. It was tranquil, peaceful. I couldn't imagine what it needed guarded from. So I asked.

"Why the guards?"

The paintbrush stopped moving for a second, but soon began its fine work again. "Some years ago, Pitch came into the Warren and destroyed every single egg. Not a single one made it out of the tunnels.

"I was lucky, though, because I had everyone else on my side. They helped to make fake eggs. North had his yetis working overtime. We made them and Sandy sent all the sad children a dream that the Easter Bunny was late and he because he was making an extra-special delivery. Tooth had all of her ladies bring them to the children."

"Did everything go well?"

"Oh yeah. I'd never felt more relieved to be believed in. I guess that's the only catch to being a Guardian. Your life is always on the line."

I nodded slowly. "So yes to guards."

Bunny chuckled. "Definitely."

"You've got a cool thing going here," I admitted. "Granted, it's a bit too green for me, but it's nice. Earthy."

Bunny shrugged. "I tried."

"And this is all your's?"

"Yep. The only other person who knows the way in is Groundhog, and we haven't spoken for some time."

I glanced around again. "Do you have seasons down here?"

"No. I don't care too much for anything but spring really." He shrugged. "Pooka magic is directly tied to the earth. It's strongest in the spring."

"Is this why you needed to get off the ship? Because you need more earth and spring weather?"

"Basically. The further away from them I am, the weaker I become. It's why I try to keep to myself unless important Guardian duties pop up."

"Is that why you're still stuck on the ship?" I asked. "Because of me?"

"Yeah." He shrugged. "All I need is to come down to earth now and again and I'll be fine. Besides, we'll all need to be more cautious soon enough. I overheard North talking with the yetis last night. Apparently we're close ta reaching the border."

That confused me. "The border?"

"It's where our magic actually stops."

"So there are boundaries were you can and can't use magic?"

"Yep. It's where there aren't any kids who believe in our existence. They don't celebrate our holidays, nor do they care ta. Mostly they're from places with smaller populations and few ways ta reach the outside world. Many still have what we consider to be old traditions.

"That's why North and I have never heard of this Berk place, but Tooth has. To her, it doesn't matter whether she's believed in or not. All memories are precious things, and the most precious are those contained within the teeth."

"Do they believe in Sandy up there?" My voice came out quieter than I expected.

Bunny thought for a moment, then shook his head. "Naw, I don't think so. Else there would've been a bigger disturbance on the globe with his disappearance."

We sat in silence for a few moments. Then I couldn't help but ask, "When did you first meet Sandy?"

"About two hundred years ago was when we became closer. Why?"

"I dunno. I've just been thinking about his a lotâ€|"

Silence.

"He's not dead, ya know," Bunny stated. "You do know that, right?"

I sighed. "I know. I just wish I knew how we could get him back."

"So do I, Frostbite, so do I."

"â€|I feel so guilty about that night, about what happened to him."

Bunny looked up. "Jack, you've got to realize you've done nothing wrong."

"But that's just it." I turned and met his eyes. "That night, I was the only one who saw what happened. Sandy, he diedâ€"no, was turned into nightmaresâ€"protecting me. It's true! Pitch was about to stab me with his dagger thing. But Sandyâ€|he got in between us.

"If I hadn't been there, if I hadn't been talking to Pitch, he'd still been here with us."

"Stop it."

The command made me shut my mouth with a snap. I looked at Bunny, who was gripping his paintbrush hard in his fist.

"Stop it. Stop blamin' yourself for what happened. You probably wouldn't've died, but you would've been gone. And then what? When I almost vanished, I had the possible faith from children. I had the other Guardians to help me get my power back. But you, you don't have any of that. Sure, you've got us, but what can we do if the children

don't believe in you?

"Sandy knew that someday we would come back and find him. He knew that you still had to find your center and your purpose. MiM chose you for a reason over the rest of us. There's something you're meant to do. Something none of us can do without you. So stop blamin' yourself and accept the fact that you're still alive and you've got us. Okay?"

"But -"

"By the moon, Jack, you're not alone anymore!"

"Noâ€|" I murmured.

"What was that?"

"No," I repeated again, louder. "No, you're right. I'm not alone anymore, am I? I was for the longest time, but now I'mâ€|not."

Bunny smiled. "There ya go."

"And Bunny?"

"Yeah mate?"

"Thanks."

He was still smiling as he continued to paint. "There we go. All done with this bugger!"

The wooden egg was completed. It was still robin's egg blue, but there was more silver and white in it, blending it into a shimmering icy hue. Surrounding the silver-gold henna were several tiny hexagons. They reminded me of snowflakes.

Bunny regarded the egg, then handed it to me. I tried to refuse it, but he insisted. "That river chose blue. My element's not ice. This was obviously meant for you. Keep it."

"Thanks."

This was the second gift I had gotten from the Guardians now. North had insisted I keep his matryoshka to remind me that we all had a center. Now Bunny's egg for everyone's faith in me. I didn't deserve it, but I pocketed it. Both items would definitely be on the desk in my room later.

Bunny got up and stretched. "Well, we should head back. It's probably nightfall up on land."

I was surprised. "But the sun's still out!"

"Magic." And with that he tapped a foot on the ground and we were sliding back up to the surface. Funny, since we were literally falling down.

The Aurora Borealis: Somewhere Over the Sea (Jack's POV)

We got back late that night. I didn't mess around with Bunny this

time; the ride from the shore to the ship was smooth. Granted, a little fast, but I think he'll thank me in the future after he finishes puking out his guts. The choice was between that or going so slow that we'd been able to see every wave crest until we passed over the clouds.

Fear or fear. Dumb choice.

I was about to go to my room when I heard the hum of wings coming down from the crow's nest. I expected it to be Baby, but I realized the sound was too loud to be someone so small. I turned around.

"Tooth?" I asked.

"Hi Jack."

She seemed incredibly solemn. I walked over to where she was fluttering. "We were all worried. You were gone all day. What is it? Has Pitch been using the nightmares?"

"What?" Tooth looked up, dazed. "Pitch? Oh no, it wasn't that. I just had to think for a while, so I went around collecting teeth. Keeping me busy, you know?"

I nodded. That was making snow days in a nutshell.

Toothiana sighed. "Jack, would you like to come out with me tonight? Iâ€¦I think I'm ready to tell you about my past."

* * *

><p>Part II â€" The Vikings

Time Lapse (Hiccup's POV)

It started like any other day since my dad left on the final raid of the year. I woke up in the workshop, some random piece of paper stuck to my cheek from sleeping on it uncomfortably. Then I'd either go to class or to the cove based on what the schedule was.

On days I went to the cove first, it started with me either fishing or stealing a basket of the morning's catch. No one ever noticed me either way. I'd take my things from my workshop and head out to where Toothless was waiting. Most days were spent with me talking about my life, learning about him, sometimes the odd conversation popping up. We'd fly with new contraptions each day, none of which seemed to work completely.

I promised myself and Toothless that I would perfect a fin soon.

Then it was off to eat a meager meal of tasteless bread and weak soup, followed by a grueling afternoon in the ring. But I had to say they were getting better.

As Gobber promised, we were moving up to harder dragons. No longer were we facing just Gronckles (which I did realize were as weak as Toothless claimed they were), but also more common dragons which were considered "upper class" kills.

After class, depending on the time, I'd either head off back to the cove or humor my fellow classmates with lessons. Not that any of them really tried any tricks I told them. They're more prone to beating a dragon with their bare hands over rubbing an eel on them before class. Everyone, that is, except Astrid. I'd been seeing less and less of her.

While I was enjoying time with Toothless, I picked up some interesting tips about them. For starters, he loved being scratched. I realized after the second time that he was shedding, and my fingernails helped to dislodge some of the peskier scales. Yet there was a certain spot right under his chin that made him fall half-unconscious with the most blissful expression on his face.

So I took that tip with me in the afternoon. That was the day we fought the Nadder for the second time. Ends up Nadders like being scratched under the chin to. The moment my fingers met its chin, the dragon was unconscious. Of course, I had to give Astrid the credit as well; she distracted the Nadder by letting out her fierce battle cry.

Most nights, I would eat dinner alone in the Great Hall and either go straight to my workshop to start a new prototype of the tailfin or hang out with Fishlegs until he went home. There usually wasn't much variation from that.

That night, though, the strangest thing happened. People approached me. Actual Vikings wanting to have a conversation. I was thoroughly uncomfortable, to say the least. Before that, the only person who would talk to me was Fishlegs, and that was only because of our little meeting in the Hall of Records. We hung out after dinner most evenings because of it.

It didn't sit well with me. What I didn't realize was it wasn't sitting well with Astrid either. She, unlike me, was used to being the center of attention. So the fact that I was 'taking her glory' was a cause of jealousy. Not trying to make her sound bad or anything.

So my days continued like that. I would wake up and sneak out, come home and go to class, sneak around some more and go to dinner, talk to a friend and work until I collapsed. As the days went by, there was more and more sneaking involved as people began to notice me. They stopped me during my routines, asking questions I had no answers for.

It finally came to me complaining more to Toothless (who would snort in disdain at my childish human problems) but he was all ears. Sometimes we'd test out the fins, most days we'd just talk, listen, and play. I found he chased reflective lights like a tamed wolf pup.

Which then worked on the Terrible Terror.

End Time Lapse.

Berk: Dragon Training Ring (Hiccup's POV)

"Meet the Terrible Terror!" shouted Gobber.

The gate opened, yet the doors failed to do so. Instead, a little hinged flap began to swing as a tiny dragon slithered out. It was really pitiful, really. No bigger than a northern hawk.

Ruffnut seemed to think so too. "Hah!" he barked. "That thing's like the size of my-"

He didn't get a chance to finish as the Terror proceeded to fly into his face, knocking the poor guy over, and chewing on his nose. I noticed its teeth were not there; it was probably gumming â€" a thing I noticed Toothless doing from time to time. When I asked why he chewed on sticks with his bare gums, I was able to sense _itchy_. Like how a baby would chew on metal and wood when they were beginning to grow new teeth.

Using my shield's metal as a reflector, I aimed a beam of light at the Terror, who noticed immediately and began to follow it. Thank the gods for sunlight. Come to think of it, this was the latest summer we'd ever had on Berk.

Tuffnut rolled over, holding his face and crying for all to hear, "Oh, I am hurt! I am very much hurt!"

I personally think he has some drama issues.

The Terror wasted no time in trying to find his prize. When I put the light onto the door of its cage, the little dragon tried to follow it. As the hinge closed shut, I put my foot on it to stop the Terror's escape.

I turned back to the group, smiling. Just about everyone seemed impressed. All except for Tuffnut (who was still rubbing his sore nose) and Astrid (who looked ready to murder something).

I caught Tuff muttering to her, "Wow, he's better than you ever were," as I left. Somehow, I didn't think it helped.

That was the only thing I actually noticed. I didn't notice the way Astrid gripped her axe tighter. I didn't notice the faint applause I was receiving from the audience that had gathered. I didn't notice Gobber exchanging a knowing glance with the village elder. I didn't notice anything more than that it was midday and time for me to get to the cove.

Berk: Village Center (Hiccup's POV)

"Gobber!" I called, running up to catch up with him.

He looked up as I flew in front of him. "Well, look who it is! Good job at the ring today! I knew you had it in you!"

What? Oh yeah, the Terrible Terror. It wasn't as terrible as I thought it would be. I nodded quickly. "Thanks Gobber. Listen, I was wondering if you were planning on using the forge today."

He thought for a moment. "Hmâ€|not that I'm aware of. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. I just wanted to work on something is all!"

That came out way too fast. I cringed a bit and forced a smile. Gobber's eyes narrowed.

"What is it this time?"

"Just a project idea I had for some time."

"Oh really?" Well, he obviously didn't believe me. "And what exactly is this 'project' you're talkin' about?" He air-quoted with is one good hand.

I swallowed. Just then, Astrid came walking by. I had an idea.

"I was going to make myself a new axe," I said.

That did the trick. Gobber's skeptical expression became bemused. "An axe? And what would you need this axe for? You could probably take a dragon with your bare hands at the rate you're going!"

Maybe with a massage, I thought, but I kept that inside.

"No, it's just that before he left for the raid, Dad gave me a battle-axe. He told me that when I held that axe, I held the village with it. But I kinda got it destroyed with the first time we faced off the Nadder. So I was thinking to make a better one. One he would be proud to wield."

Gobber's expression softened. He patted me on the shoulder and nodded. "Well, I'm sure he is proud of you, Hiccup. He's just bad at expressing it. But I'll let you have the forge for the rest of the day, and tomorrow if ya need it."

"Thanks Gobber." Sometimes he felt more like an uncle and friend than anyone else.

"Right," he stated. "I'm not allowed to choose favorites, but I've got a pretty good bet that you'll be the next to perform the initiation ceremony."

My blood froze. "What?"

"Yep. Been seeing the Elder more and more lately. She's been hanging around the ring watching everyone's performance, and yours is definitely eye-catchin' to say the least. If anyone's becoming a Viking, it's you."

Oh Thor Almighty, spare me from this. Not now, not when I'd just started to understand how different dragons were from us. And how similar. I coughed lightly and nodded.

"Well, I'll go get my stuff," I mumbled awkwardly.

Gobber laughed. "Yes, of course! I'll see you at dinner then, Hiccup!"

"Right, sure, of course! Okay, cool. Excellent, so I'll, uh, I'll see you then!"

As Gobber walked away, I felt a punch on my shoulder. I cried out, grabbing my injured arm and spinning around, only to find Astrid

there. That wasn't something I was expecting. I gave her a stupid grin. "Oh, Astrid. Hi!"

She scowled. "Hiccup."

"Was there something you wanted?" I asked after a few moments.

Astrid didn't say anything for a second, obviously collecting her thoughts. Perhaps my lack of response had set her off? I usually tried to make contact, but this time was different.

She shook her head. "It's nothing. I've just noticed you aren't around most days. Why is that?"

It was my turn to be shocked into silence. Honestly, what was I supposed to say? 'Oh, it's nothing really. I'm just housing a Night Fury in the woods. We're really close, so close in fact that I can sometimes talk to him!' As if!

"Personal training," I ended up stating.

"That doesn't mean anything to me," she snapped.

"Great!" I ended the conversation as quickly as I could. "Which reminds me I have to go!"

I ran off to my workshop before her reply. When I got there, I snuck a glance over my shoulder. She hadn't moved, but her interest wasn't on me anymore. For once, I was truly glad about that.

Berk: Raven's Point (Astrid's POV)

It just wasn't adding up.

I hopped over a fallen log, did a quick tumble, then threw my axe as hard as I could at the nearest tree. It hit its mark, just as I knew it would. Years of training under my father did that. No one messed with a Hofferson. Especially one who became as tough and Viking-like as everyone reminds me I am.

I have standards to meet. High standards. It happens when both your parents were top-notch students in dragon training, aside from the chief (of course). And I'm not one to make an argument that just because Hiccup is indeed a Haddock means he has the "right" to be better. Chief's son or not.

Thwack! My axe hit its mark again. And again. And again.

My frustration was boiling. What was I doing wrong? Something wasn't right. It couldn't be.

I was rolling, tumbling, throwing; harder, faster, stronger. What was I doing wrong?

I knew who I was, who others were, especially when the world gets tough. I'm the one who takes these feelings and works them off with a good old-fashioned physical conditioning. Some people cry when they're angry or in turmoil. Like Fishlegs. He was a crybaby. Some people hid away from the rest of the world. Like the twins. Some even

tried to force their feelings onto others. Like Snot. And there are the rare few who hide their emotions so well you can never really tell what's really going on in their heads.

Like Hiccup.

I stopped, panting, thinking. There was something truly off with Hiccup. Well, aside from the fact that he makes a miserable excuse of a Viking. How in the world did Hiccup manage to do anything useful? What was he doing that I couldn't understand?

I won't say that I'm much of a thinker. That's usually the work of elders and such. But today was a day that needed thought.

I don't like taking breaks when I'm working on polishing my skills, but I sat down on the fallen tree and began to think. So many little tricks had been pulled on the dragons, but none of them involved the use of a weapon. I made note of each.

The Gronckle: knocked out and drooling by some grass rubbed on its nose. The Nadder: scratched somewhere on its head. I decided scratching based on the noise I heard, and the fact that Hiccup's nails were in worse shape than usual. The Zippleback: scared by an eel. And now there was today with the Terror: chasing light.

It didn't make sense. None of these things could actually kill a dragon, could they? When did he learn this? And when I confronted him today, the only thing he said was "personal training." Since when did Hiccup train? Last I checked he was in his little cabin all day doing gods know what!

He had to be cheating. That was the only conclusion I could come up with. That, or he'd actually had some encounters with dragons. Highly unlikely, so cheating it was. However, I couldn't prove that he was actually cheating, so I'd have to beat him fair and square.

Standing, I started pounding my axe into the tree again with each toss. Lofting it over my head comfortably had taken years; it was passed down through my family all seven generations that Vikings had been living on Berk. Before long I was working up a sweat, but not in a bad way. It was a good kind, like the one that makes you feel like you're getting somewhere.

The tree had nicks all along it. It was the tree I always used for training like today. After a particularly hard throw " which took an even harder yank to free my weapon " I heard the sound of rustling leaves. My fighting instincts kicked in. I rolled and held the axe high, ready to throw it at my potential enemy|

only to see Hiccup standing there. He was wearing something weird: a vest that didn't cover his front or sides very well, made of tough brown leather. In his hands was a bundle that was almost as long as he was tall. Curious.

Hiccup's green eyes met mine for a second before he nodded awkwardly and walked away. My gaze followed his receding figure until he was out of sight. Then as quietly as I could, I snuck after him. I didn't get far, however, for the moment he slipped past a boulder he vanished into the thick summer foliage.

I glanced around for a few seconds to make sure he truly wasn't there until I gave up, slamming my fist down on the boulder I'd climbed upon and letting out a frustrated grunt. Someday soon I was going to get to the bottom of this. I swore upon my axe and the gods I would.

Berk: The Cove (Hiccup's POV)

"I think I might've made an enemy with the only Viking who has an ounce of common sense!"

Toothless gave me a blank-eyed stare. Then he nudged my hand to continue. Which I did.

"Her name is Astrid."

He snorted.

I glowered while picking up the saddle and slipping it onto Toothless's back. "Laugh all you want, but that's her name. And it's way more respectable than 'Hiccup.'"

_Says the one who named me Toothless. _

"It doesn't make sense!" I cried out, completely ignoring him (and tightening the straps tighter than usual; Toothless whapped me in the head for that). "All I've done is stop myself from being killed by what you think of as 'weak dragons' and she hates me. I saw her doing target practice in the woods today. I bet she was imagining my face on that tree."

Did she follow you? he asked.

"No, I managed to evade in the foliage."

Good.

Grabbing the tailfin, I started complaining again. "And now there's dragon training on top of that! I mean, I'm not trying to do anything special, and the next thing I know everyone's done nothing but pay attention to me. I can barely sneak out of the village now! And at dinner, everyone surrounds me and starts asking questions and trading tips on killing dragons and stuff. Which I have no interest in anymore!"

Toothless made the gurgling sound in the back of his throat â€" which I recently discovered was him laughing â€" very obviously.

"Don't mock me!" I begged. "You're probably the only one who listens to me, aside from Gobber, and I can't even tell him about your existence!"

I got a slobbery apology lick on the cheek. After wiping it away, I scratched him behind the headfins (which seemed to act like the whiskers of a mouse). "Thanks bud."

He purred. I was careful to avoid the point that would make him faint. I wondered, was that a common point among all dragons. Not that I'd want to test it, but Nadders liked to be scratched under the

chins too.

"Well," I said. "I've got some good news. I've finished finalizing the fin controls, so we can test it out in the next couple of days. Sound good, bud?"

Again, he was jumping around so much that it was hard to calm him. And it's a real task to control a hyperactive Night Fury. By the time I did, both of us had somehow managed to tumble into the lake, scaring all the fish and birds from the area.

I popped out first, laughing. Toothless slid under me so I was propped safely on his back. He walked onto land, where I leaned over and grabbed the foot pedals. "Here, let me down so I can get this set up."

It took a few long moments " with Toothless sighing more than necessary " before I was able to finish hooking up the contraption. It looked better than I thought it would: secure, accurate, controllable. I smirked a bit at the last thought. Two pedals couldn't control a dragon's will " especially a feisty one like Toothless " but it was the only thing that could make him fly.

"Shall we test this out, then?" I asked.

Toothless gave me the most of-course-you-idiot glare I'd ever seen. I laughed and patted him on the back and hopped on.

"Okay, let's see if this works!" Toothless was ready to launch himself straight up when I shouted, "No, wait! Stop!"

He was definitely irritated. _What is it this time?_

"Two very important things. One, I have no idea how to control this thing yet. We should figure out the controls at a low altitude where I can record them. And secondly, Astrid's still in the area. I think we can both agree that we don't want her to catch us."

Toothless agreed. _Sounds fair. From what I gathered, she's much more capable of beheading the two of us than you are of decapitating a twig._

"That made absolutely no sense," I said after a moment.

Shrug. _It sucks, though. I was really looking forward to stretching out my wings again._

I scratched his head. "Sorry, bud. We'll see about tomorrow. If my sightings are correct we should be having another nice day. That's weird though. It's usually snowing by now"

Toothless chose to ignore me and nudged the rope I used for measurements towards me; it'd fallen out of the leather I used to wrap the fin in earlier.

Hopping onto Toothless's back, I let him guide me. He glided easily out of the cove and towards the clearing nearby. We were hidden from all but the sea with the tree line. No worries about Astrid unless she decided to follow me this far past Raven's Point.

Toothless lead me to the edge of a cliff. It faced out to sea, where the sun was beginning to set. Grass tickled my ankles as a strong current blew in. The view was breathtakingâ€”literallyâ€”and I feltâ€”free. In that moment, the sky was the limit. That, and a downed dragon.

I noticed there was a post there. Really, it was conveniently sticking out of the ground where nothing else but tall grass was. Toothless landed in front of it and placed the rope on the stump. He gave me an expectant look.

"What?"

Toothless continued to look at me until we both realized we were unable to communicate again. He huffed in frustration, then flipped the rope onto his neck. I got the message.

"You want me to tie you?"

He nodded.

"To this stump?"

More nodding.

"Okayâ€”"

I did as Toothless wanted, more confused than ever. He wasted no time in putting the other half of the rope onto the post. I took the message and tied him securely. Once that was done, Toothless gestured for me to get on his back, which I did. I strapped myself in and waited for something to happen.

A gust of wind decided to pick up then. Toothless opened his wings and glided, unable to move due to the tether. Suddenly, it all made sense.

"Oh, I get it! You want me to figure out the controls where it's safe! Good idea, bud!"

He huffed. _Give me some credit!_

"Oh, so you're talking now are you?" I said snidely.

Toothless ignored me. He just waited for the next strong breeze and opened his wings. I took the cue to rip out a sheet of parchment from my journal.

"Let's see, there are six possible combinations with two pedalsâ€”"

I got the first three with no problem. As I finished and recorded the fourth (in which Toothless landed easily and gave me a knowing smile of approval) another gust of wind came along. We were just about ready to fly when it suddenly picked up more than we'd expected.

Neither of us was able to suppress our surprised screams as the rope snapped and we were sent flying backwards into the trees.

I groaned as I tried to get up. Neither of us was seriously hurt, but I was pretty banged up. As Toothless stood, I noticed I was dangling off the saddle by the vest hooks. Forcing my way up I yanked at the cork, but nothing happened.

And then I realized I was stuck. The metal ring had been smashed under a now-flattened hook, and there was no way I could pull it apart. The only way I could think of getting it off was to cut the leather and redo the saddle. And the only way to cut this tough leather was with a dagger. And the only place to get a dagger was in the village. And the village was full of blood-thirsty ready-to-kill-a-dragon-on-sight Vikings.

"Oh great."

Berk: Village Center (Hiccup's POV)

"Hiccup," a random Viking greeted me. I gave him a smile and a casual wave. He was probably the last person to be passing through Berk for the night. Seeing that all the torches were off as well, I sighed in relief; we were still under the cover of darkness.

Checking that the coast was indeed clear, I yanked Toothless in the opposite direction of the man and towards the forge. He resisted slightly, but followed. With each step we took, Toothless seemed to get more and more distracted. He wasn't being anything near obedient. On the contrary, his attention was diverted at every little thing.

"What now?" I hissed at him as he turned for the hundredth time. "We can't get caught!"

I've never been in a human village before. Calm down. I'll be quiet.

I sighed. "You have a point, but we're in dangerous territory now. And we can't fly out if worse comes to worse. Just try to stay with me, okay?"

He nodded.

We were just at the entrance of the forge now. I could feel some of the fear I had dissolving. We made it! Thank the gods. I offered a silent prayer before slipping through the windows. Toothless checked a bucket for fish; finding it empty, he tossed it away.

_Stupid empty human storage vessels, _I could practically hear him mutter.

Letting out a breathy laugh, I forced Toothless through the window to the empty forge. It was darker than I'd ever seen it. There were no fires burning or lights lit. Completely deserted.

Toothless tensed. I could feel him eyeing the weapons nervously. I scratched between his shoulder blades gently. "It's okay bud. Don't worry. I won't let anything hurt you, okay? I'm just going to grab a small dagger and cut the cord. Then we'll be out of here in no time."

He nodded.

I located a knife without any problems.

Hurry!

"I'm trying, bud. I'm really trying!" And right when I was in the middle of trying to snap the cord, I heard a voice that made my blood run cold.

"Hiccup?"

Astrid?

Berk: The Forge (Astrid's POV)

I definitely heard a sound coming from near the forge. And there were only two people who would possibly feel comfortable enough to be around sharp weapons at this time of night: Gobber—who I knew for a fact was drinking to the point of passing out at dinner today—and Hiccup.

Granted, Hiccup shouldn't be anywhere near weapons in my opinion. But since when has anyone said anything against weapons to the chief's son. Sometimes he got privileges to almost kill himself with.

Come to think of it, had Hiccup even shown up for dinner? I didn't think so; the place was ridiculously somber without his grinning personality there. I didn't mind. It was the first time I got peace and quiet for the past ten days or so.

"Hiccup?" I called as I approached the forge. There were no lights on. Perhaps I had just been hearing things?

Right when I was about to check inside, Hiccup slid out from the booth and closed the wooden doors behind him. I noticed he was wearing the same odd vest I'd caught him in the other day. Hiccup, for once in the last several days, seemed pretty nervous.

"Hi Astrid!" he greeted. "Hi Astrid, hi Astrid, hi Astrid."

Well, that was unusual.

"Where were you at dinner today?" I asked.

His grin faltered. So there was something going on. I continued. "I mean, I know you usually don't eat much, but Fishlegs was complaining about how you didn't show up to the Hall of Records after dinner, which I know you wouldn't ditch. So what's been going on?"

"Like I said earlier, training," he mumbled. Hiccup backed up even more until both his shoulders were against the doors. It almost looked like he'd been dragged, but it must've been a trick of the light (or lack thereof).

I frowned. "You've been acting weird lately."

He jerked back from the stomach as if my words had literally punched him in the gut. A nervous laugh soon followed.

My eyebrows rose. I reassessed my answer. "Wellâ€|weirder."

Then, gods be good, I watched as Hiccup began to levitate. His back was still to the window's large shutters as he rose above the ground. His eyes met mine, a look of surprise on his face. Then he flew backwards through the doors.

I ran over, frozen shock gone, and opened them with a resonating bang. But the forge was empty. The only sign that there had been anything there was the swinging of the shields that hung from the ceiling. Had he been a trick my tired mind played on me, or a vision from the gods?

I stood for a second and pondered this. Coming up with nothing, I sighed, shrugged, and headed home.

Berk: The Cove (Hiccup's POV)

"Too close," I gasped when we safely arrived back to the cove.

Toothless nodded his head vigorously. He picked up nodding from me.

"Imagine if she caught us!" I shuddered. "I would be disowned and you would be dead!"

_A boy on a dragon sprinting through the night. What an interesting thought, though, _Toothless said.

Despite everything, I smiled. I slid off the saddle and began sawing away at the tough leather cords. They frayed and gave, snapping roughly and dropping me from the constricting position I was in. I stood up straight for the first time since mid-afternoon and took a deep breath. My ribs felt restricted as I breathed.

"What got you running anyway?" I asked him.

He seemed embarrassed, looking at his paws meekly. _A sheep, _he finally confessed.

"Really? You almost got us caught for a sheep?"

I was hungry and it was there! What was I supposed to do?

"Sit there, maybe?"

Besides, you weren't doing a very good job of convincing that Astrid girl that nothing strange was going on while you were snooping around the village at night!

"Well excuse me for trying to get us not caught!"

As I let my chest cavity stretch, Toothless prepared a place to bed. Without him asking I undid the various straps and freed him of the saddling equipment.

"That must've been really uncomfortable. I'm sorry about that, bud."

He shrugged (another human thing he picked up). _I'm okay. My scales are getting tougher._

Toothless angled his shoulders so I could see. It was true; the scales around where the leather bore in were newer and much rougher than the others surrounding the area. Toothless had finished shedding three days ago and it was a hassle to gather scales to compare. My inner investigator was beyond curious by the shape and size of his scales.

Are you okay? You seem to have breathing problems.

"I'm fine," I replied. "It was just the vest. I'll make a way to take it off more easily."

Once I caught my breath, I gathered up the saddle. "I should get back. It's late, and I've got this thing to repair. 'Night, bud."

He licked me on the cheek. I grinned and gathered everything together before heading home. Or, at least for now, my temporary sleep space in my workshop. I'd been there every night that I'd brought my blanket from home and set it up on the floor. I even sewed a mattress using an old sail and filled it with sheep wool.

The saddle was, surprisingly, a quick fix. But the whole no moments of rest for the last few days was catching up to me. The moment I put the leather contraption down and settled onto my makeshift mattress I was out like wind to a candle. Usually when I was this exhausted, I would fall asleep and immediately wake up the next morning.

This night, however, was different. Because I, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III, had a nightmare. The first nightmare in six years.

* * *

><p>I still can't believe I'm up to 50 favorites and 77 followers for this story! It's really grown in the past few months, which I thank you all for! Everyone who reads, likes, and posts reviews â€" you guys keep me going with this little endeavor!

Next chapter will be up when I can manage. That is all.

Stay beautiful!

Sushi

11. The Purest of Bonds

Hey peoples!

Exams are over! I've now officially completed my junior year of high school! Senior year, here I come!

Warning: long and somewhat-important author's note at the end of this chapter. That, and this is my longest chapter by far. No further comments. Read on.

* * *

><p>11 " The Purest of Bonds

* * *

><p>Part I " The Guardians

Aurora Borealis: Somewhere Over the Sea (Jack's POV)

I looked at Tooth incredulously. "Wait, you're going to tell me about your past? Are you sure? You don't have to if you don't want to!"

"No!" She covered her mouth apologetically as her shout echoed around the abandoned ship. Her violet eyes met my blue ones. "No, Jack. I'm positive. I promised myself I'd do it sooner or later. You deserve to know how it was for everyone, to know that it was hard for all of us to become Guardians. So please, will you help me collect teeth tonight. I promise I'll tell you everything you want to know."

I hesitated. Something about the whole ordeal seemed painful for the both of us. But Tooth deserved my trust as much as anyone of the ship, and I didn't want to lose hers yet.

"If you insist," I said finally.

She smiled. "Thank you."

Taking my hand, Tooth led me into the sky. "I was thinking more of a relaxed night. My girls said they would do all of the collecting if I wasn't feeling up to it. A few will stick around and give me some support."

"Works for me," I replied. I didn't realize several little fairies hovering around behind the fringe of her dress. They came out as she acknowledged them.

"Come out ladies! Just make sure you keep your composure around Jack."

"I promise I won't bite," I joked while flashing a smile.

A few looked ready to faint. One did. Baby Tooth (who had been with them) didn't look amused. Tooth laughed good-naturedly and tutted. "Now now, what did I just say?"

They looked at her apologetically. I forgave them, as did she. Then she turned to me. "Want to get off the ship?"

"Would I ever!"

Tooth smiled. She took off, and I followed.

"Good. There's a little village off the shore of the Norse peninsula that's all but abandoned. No kids will see us there."

"Wait, they can see you?" I asked.

"It's a Guardian thing. If you hold something they care about " they believe in you. And if they believe in you-

"They see you," I finished. "I remember Bunny explaining that to me."

He did, didn't he? It felt like a lifetime ago since that. It was before we had set sail. Before everything bad had happened.

I nodded to Tooth. "Thanks for clarifying that. Just one thing I didn't get to ask him then."

"Ask away, Jack!"

"Is that the only way one can be seen?"

Tooth hesitated before replying, "Being believed in, yes."

"So would I always be invisible to adults?"

"We all can be. Even Pitch."

"Can be?"

"Some of them still subconsciously believe in us. Say I was walking down the street. Or, well, flying. Some adults would see me and move out of the way. Others wouldn't but they'd still unconsciously move. It's a bit of magical protection we Guardians have. No one would take a second glance at us. We would literally become just another person in the background."

"That makes sense in a weird wayâ€|"

"It takes a while to get used to. It's like how I just know what someone's lost a tooth and it's under their pillow. At first it was strange â€" I still remember getting a bit terrified when my senses worked â€" but it's become so natural I don't think twice about it."

I nodded. Tooth pointed to a line on the horizon. "There's the shore. We should be there in a moment."

Wow, was it that short of a flight? We must've been much further north than I had originally thought. Come to think of it, my winter psyches were beginning to work. I guess I could relate to Tooth on some level; I just know when winter was going to happen and how I'm going to start it. Every year too. If you get strange weather, sorry. I get bored. It kinda sucks doing the same exact thing for three hundred years without any merits.

Tooth picked up her pace a bit and I quickly angled my body to follow her. She was heading towards a village which I could finally make out. We flew over the rooftops until we came to a little building with a flat top. Tooth landed there with all of her ladies fluttering around her shoulders. I settled down beside her.

Our feet dangled over the edge. The sky was a perfect, cloudless navy; as always, the moon was shining full and bright. Baby Tooth settled on my shoulder; I put up my hood to make her more comfortable. Tooth was the first to break the silence.

"Soâ€|" she began. "What exactly did North tell you about

me?"

"Wellâ€¦" I told Tooth everything I knew about her past. She didn't interject once. She just listened. When I finished I watched her reaction carefully. Tooth just remained on the edge of the roof. She looked up from her feet after a moment.

"Thank you, Jack. This makes it a lot easier for me."

"Is it okay if you could explain a few things?" I asked her.

Tooth nodded and gestured with her hand for me to continue.

"I'm just curious as to what fairy culture is like? I mean, I heard it had structure and that it was laidback, so I guess it's just a bit confusing."

"It can be confusing. Even I was confused when I lived there." Tooth nodded. "Most everyone in a fairy village has a job or a role. This could be anywhere from farming to public service to accounting. It's almost like a caste system: you usually get your parents' jobs. For example, my mother was a seamstress for humans and my father was a gardener. As a young girl I was expected to go to work with them at least twice a week.

"In that sense, fairy culture is strict and rule-oriented. You're expected to do things, though not required. That was my problem. I was too busy off exploring the forests and meeting other creatures. Fairies hold a common tongue with most animals in Braziland so I would have conversations with birds, insects, mice, even panthers on occasion. That was the life I wanted to live.

"But my biggest passion was children. My neighbor, Marco, he was the son of a baker and a nurse. He had no desire to do either. He was nowhere near as free-spirited as me, though. He only said that he wasn't going to follow in his parents' wingpaths."

"Did he?" I asked.

"In the end he did. But his words got me to do something I wasn't supposed to. I took on a babysitting role. I would go to the highest tree every day and have all the little ones come up and play with me. I would make up games and stories with new rules that didn't have to do anything with what society had us do. And at the end of the day, I would fly the all home and write down everything we did in my journals. They all had fun. Even I had fun for once.

"But others didn't look up to me like the kids did. They frowned upon the fact that I wasn't 'doing my expected jobs.' I couldn't help that. I was different. Eventually my parents wouldn't speak to me at meals. It got too hard to bear."

I cleared my throat. "So you did leave after that, right?"

"I did."

"Was itâ€¦voluntary?"

"I did what felt right." Tooth's violet eyes, which had been trained on the stars, focused on mine. "Don't think that I was forced to

leave. It was my choice and my free will that got me away from home. Nothing else. If I hadn't left my fate would have changed. Sometimes I think it would've changed for the worst."

"Leaving made you who you are today," I concluded.

Tooth smiled. "It did. And I'm glad it did."

"And there was a little detail about after you came back home. When you were...well, you. What was that like?"

"Can I reply honestly?"

I nodded.

"It was the worst experience of my life."

I laughed. Tooth gave me an indignant look.

"It's true. No one treated me the way they used to treat me. It was nice at first because I could change the rules to what I thought was best. Then it got annoying. They would crowd around me and touch the hem of my clothes like I was royalty! They even asked me how to do things they already knew how to do just to get 'royal opinion!'" She even air-quoted to make a point. "All because I was the appointed ambassador!"

I winced. "Okay, that does suck." Then another question came to mind. "Did you already have your dress then?"

"No, actually. I had my girls, but this was before I gave up my memories so they were basically living capsules."

"That's a cheery way of looking at it."

"Don't blame me! They were the ones who came up with it."

"But they're technically your essence, right? So therefore, they are your opinions. Cancels out."

"That made no sense."

"It didn't, did it?"

We both smiled. Then Tooth sighed and finished answering my question. "All in all, I just wore a normal dress like they did back in the day. I even had an apron because I was more humble than royal. In the end, I left again and joined the high council because it was so unbearable. I didn't even say goodbye to my parents. It was for the best, I think. They barely accepted me in the first place. And I didn't have any friends so it wasn't like my life ended there. It was more like a beginning, I think."

"I just thought of this when I mentioned the dress," I cut in. "I heard from North that the transformation from what you were to what you are now was painful."

Her smile faltered a bit. "That's one of the good things about losing some memories, I guess," she said finally. "That pain, when I revisit it, there's no way I can function normally after it all. The

pain is like nothing else. Imagine being pulled apart from every point of your body, burning the whole time. That's a little like how I felt. The only other time I ever felt any noticeable magnitude of pain was during labor."

"Labor?" I asked, confused. "You mean like giving birth."

"Exactly that."

"How did that happen?" I asked. I never imagined Tooth to be married, let alone pregnant with a kid. She didn't seem the type to me, I guess.

"I met a man, like any story involving a kid goes. We fell in love, we got married. One thing lead to another and the next thing I knew I was there."

I hesitated. Something about having a younger child to take care of was oddly familiar, and I didn't like it. It was an uncomfortable feeling between remembering and losing the though forever. "Was it a boy or a girl?"

"A little girl. We named her Elizabeth. Lizzie for short." Tooth was smiling. "She had the pinkest little feet, and tiny little fingers. And her eyesâ€|they were the same color as mine."

"'We' as in you and your husband?"

"Yes."

Everything in that story seemed too perfect, too normal. There had to be a catch. I asked, "So how did you die?"

All happiness died in that moment. I feel a bit bad for it. The silence between me and Tooth felt overstretched, like too little frost on a windowpane. I cleared my throat after a moment. "You really don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

"No no, I promised I'd get this off of my chest sooner or later. I died after childbirth."

"Isn't that uncommon or something?"

"It is, but it was back then and not now. Besides, I had eclampsia. There was no way to save me."

Eclampsia? "I've never heard of it."

"It's a bit complicated. In fact no one's really sure what causes it. But the result is just about always death." Tooth sighed. "The Man in the Moon pitied me about not knowing how I died, so he let me see. This was after I had given up the thought of living again."

"I was able to make it through childbirth, and the baby was fine. Albeit, she was a bit small, but perfectly healthy. I was able to hold her and nurse her once. Later on, I died from a seizure. It wasn't immediate, though. I was in a coma first. Back then, there was nothing they could do."

I sat in stone-shock silence, unsure exactly what to say. Tooth,

thankfully, got it. "You don't need to say anything, Jack. Even I didn't know what to think of it."

I nodded slowly. Then I remembered something. "Hold on. How do you remember this?"

"The Man in the Moon holds this memory. He's letting me see it right now. See?"

I looked up and sure enough he was there. The full moon with a single beam of light hitting Tooth's face directly.

"Is this how you remember your child?' I asked. "About little Lizzie?"

She nodded.

"Do you even miss your memories? Of having them, I mean."

"Sometimes, but in the end I think it was for the best. Having a life without much happiness isn't something I like to think about too much."

I noted that Tooth had been holding her dress in two fists the whole time. The cloth was wrinkled at different spots where she had grabbed onto her memories. It was oddly creepy. I didn't have memories because they had been taken from me, both by the Man in the Moon and Pitch. Tooth had hers, but even it looked like they didn't actually belong to her.

"About being ambassador?"

"That's because I grew up. Each area in Braziland holds a different species of fairies. My species of origin is the one with this color of feathers. I know the other four are as follows: red and yellow, orange and purple, dark blue and magenta, and silver and black. Mine is the green to turquoise, but we have some accents of the other colors. Each does, but we use the two primary colors to symbolize ourselves.

"Now, each species has an ambassador. Only one fairy a generation will be an ambassador. Usually there is only one because the other dies before the new one's transformation is complete. So when I came into power, there was a vacant seat in the council. Only if the ambassador would choose to give up their duties would a new one be assigned.

"Do you have any other questions?" she asked.

I thought for a moment. "Only one."

"Oh?"

"What's the rest of your story? The one that involves you and your husband?"

"Oh, that!" Tooth's face lit up with genuine happiness. "That's one I can tell you! But I can't do it alone."

All the little fairies around Tooth huddled closer to her. She let them flutter on and off of her fingers. "You've noticed my ladies, right?"

"Yeah," I replied. "Your workers. They used to be your memories. North told me," I explained.

She nodded. "Did he tell you anything else about them?"

"No, not really."

"Okay. Well, there's another thing about a select few of them I wanted to say. I just told you about how I died, so it's best you know why the memories of my husband are so dear to me." Tooth sighed. "You see, Jack, I never gave them up completely."

"What?"

"It's true. The most important seven memories of him I have are still flying free. It's why they usually stay with me."

"Just seven?"

Tooth nodded. "If I kept too many, I would only reminisce about my past. I wouldn't work."

The ladies came fluttering over, hovering in front of Tooth. She stroked them each on the cheek fondly.

"I like to only have them in times of need," she explained, "or when I'm alone. These memories are little private ones. I want to keep them safe because they're all I have."

I was a bit awestruck. I'd heard of love; I understood what it was and how much some people needed it. I never thought I would experience that first-hand. I scooted closer to Tooth. "Can I ask what those memories are? No details, just what it is?"

She nodded. As she began to speak, one of the little fairies fluttered into her hand. "The first one is the day we met. It was also the first time I had gone into a human town. It was for part of my job as a peace-keeping ambassador back in the day. Anyways, I was so distracted by the vibrancy of the place I just happened to fly straight into a gentleman trying to carry a mountain of books. The books flew everywhere, as did his glasses. Nothing was damaged in the end except for my pride, I guess."

We both laughed. Tooth smiled now. "He was so apologetic then, like it was his fault I wasn't looking where I was going. In the end, he invited me for a bit of coffee and we got to know each other from then."

The first fairy left as a second one came over.

"The second memory was when he proposed to me. We had been together for over two years then. It was summer and we were at the park having a picnic under the biggest oak tree by the lake. We'd been there all day and the sun was setting. He took me to the edge of the lake and got down on one knee on the pier."

"That's actually pretty romantic. That sort of stuff is dying out now," I noted.

"Is it really?"

"Yup."

"That's really sad," Tooth exclaimed.

I nodded to show my agreement. Then I gestured for her to continue. "Number three?"

A new fairy, a new memory. "Was when he took me to meet the parents. I was so nervous then, I could barely sit still. I flew right into the doorframe when he opened the door for me! And they were just as apologetic about it too, saying their house wasn't made for people like me!"

I couldn't help but laugh again. "Are you serious? They apologized to you?"

"What a bad impression, I know! But they were so sweet to me. They didn't care that the marriage would be deemedâ€|unfitting. Interspecies relationships were frowned upon then. They still are, but it's not as common for two species to meet."

"True that."

"We were both afraid we wouldn't get their blessings. He was several years older than I was, and fairies usually live twice as long as humans as it were. But they were accepting and it meant the world to me.

"The fourth one is our honeymoon. I'll keep those details sparse."

"Riiiiiiightâ€|" I wolf-whistled to make a point.

"Not like that, silly!" She laughed and nudged me lightly. "It was loving and intimate, so I'm keeping that secret. We went to the beach, the two of us, then the mountains. Away from other people. It was nice."

I was pretty eager to hear the next memory. What? Can't say you weren't interested too, can you?

"The fifth was when I figured out I was pregnant. We were both so naïve that neither of us was able to put the symptoms together. We were overjoyed, to say the least." Tooth smiled. "It was the first time I was truly hit with the magnitude of settling down. We were starting our own family. It meant so much to me, and to him."

"Number six?"

"It was the day before I felt my first contraction. It was a chilly November evening. There was a fire in the hearth and mugs of hot chocolate on the table. We were wearing sweaters and sitting in our own armchairs. My husband had looked up from the book he was reading. I was busy finishing up a quilt.

"He said to me, 'Ana, promise you'll be there for me.'

"I told him it was a silly thing to request. When he asked why, I said to him, 'Do you really think I'll ever leave you behind? I think I love you too much for that!'"

Neither of us said a word for several moments. I closed my eyes, trying to imagine what it must've been like for Tooth to go through all of the things she had, with all of the loss. How losing those memories were actually better for her. And how it might be better for me too.

Finally, I was able to muster up enough courage to ask, "Number seven? The last one?"

She pointed to me. "Is the one hiding in your hood."

"Baby Tooth?"

Tooth nodded. Baby fluttered out from where she was perched on my shoulder.

"Baby here," she said with her arms outstretched and palms cupped protectively. The little fairy fluttered into Tooth's palms and allowed herself to be hugged to the larger's chest. "Baby Tooth holds the memory of my wedding day."

"Your wedding dayâ€|"

"It was also the day that I gave up my duties as ambassador to live a more normal life."

"Wowâ€|"

I trailed off, awed. It seemed like such a simple thing in concept. I mean, it's just a memory, right? Right? I'm sure that's what some people would say. But for meâ€|to see Tooth's happy, nostalgic smile on her face as she held Baby so gently and protectively and motherlyâ€|it feltâ€|

I couldn't even describe it. I still don't think I can. It's a long and complicated equation of adding and subtracting all the little emotions I don't even have names for in my head.

Tooth sighed and let go of Baby, who adjusted her feathers slightly and squeaked a question to Tooth. She laughed, wiping away a few stray tears. "I'm fine! There's no need to worry."

All her little workers snuggled in for a hug. Tooth kept laughing, crying now, holding them close. "Oh, look at me! Just a bit of memory and I can't even keep it together like I keep telling you girls to."

There was a twitter of mock-scolding. At least, I thought there was. I don't exactly speak Fairiese or anything. All in all, they all seemed to be telling Tooth that she was okay, and that there was nothing to be ashamed of.

As they pulled away, I did one of the strangest things. I turned

towards Tooth and opened my arms. She flew into them with a force that knocked me back slightly in the air. I fell a bit, laughing with her as we regained altitude.

That was the first hug I had given in my memory.

Finally, Tooth let go and pointed towards the horizon. "We should probably get back to the ship."

I grinned. "Yeah, we should."

For once, I didn't object to the idea of being stuck on it. Sure, fresh air was nice, but I did actually have something there that I cared about. People that I cared about. Even the yetis and Roxy the dragon who hated my guts.

Maybe that's what having a family felt like.

Aurora Borealis: The Border (Jack's POV)

It was late afternoon and I was enjoying a short nap until I was woken quite violently by Phil. He almost knocked me off the bed in alarm. Granted, that's not how I like to start my mornings so I may have accidentally hurt him without realizing.

"I'm sorry man!" I said after letting him use the edge of my bed sheets to stop the massive nosebleed my staff was able to manage. "I wasn't expecting you. Are you okay?"

He nodded and gave me the thumbs up. I grinned.

"So what brings you to my quarters today? It must be important if you're shaking me awake."

Phil's eyes widened in panic and his arms began to flail. It was a ridiculous sight, in all honesty; he was in total freak-out mode with blood running down his face and ancient Tibetan rambling out of his mouth a mile a minute. I nodded slowly.

"Yeahâ€¦no. You do realize I still have no idea what you're saying, right?"

The yeti immediately stopped talking and grabbed me by the waist and throwing me over his shoulder. I barely was able to keep my grip on my staff as he raced out of the room and up the ladder. This wasn't a normal case.

When we reached the deck, the wind buffeted us with wave after wave of power. Rain slammed the deck. All the yetis were running to and fro, tying down just about everything. The sails were snapping violently. It looked like the set of some bad high-seas film. Phil dragged me to where North was standing: behind the wheel.

North looked relieved. "Jack! Thank Manny you're here. Quick, I need your help!"

I went over to stand by him. Every monitor and handle was literally out of control. The steering wheel was in the hands of North (who's a strong guy, mind you), but even I could tell he was struggling to keep it straight. I frowned, shouting over the wind, "What's

happening?"

"We're about to pass the border." He pointed to the break in the clouds. "Once we pass the storm, all magic is gone. We will need you to stabilize this!"

"Me?" I asked. "How can I do this?"

"You can tame wind long enough to slow our descent. If we can make it to ocean without crashing ship, we can sail to Berk. If notâ€¦"

He didn't finish. He didn't have to. Immortal we may be, but having to swim to shore wasn't exactly easy. Especially for North and Bunny. They didn't have the option of flying.

I flew into the storm, only to feel myself being thrown left and right. "Wind! Calm down! Stop!"

Then I realized I couldn't control it. The horror I felt in that moment made my heart skip a few beats (because it does beat). But then I realized this was the magical boundary; I probably wasn't allowed to tamper with that. I tried calling wind from a different area, but neither the wind from where we had sailed from and where we were sailing to could break through the barrier.

I went back to North. "I can't control the wind here! It's too strong. It must be magic or something. Can you fly lower by chance?"

"No can do! If I fly lower, the altitude will be too low for flying magic to work. There is no sky dock to stabilize ascent or descent."

So we were basically out of options.

I flew over to the other side, away from the storm. It had literally sucked away my energy. I gasped, drained. There was no way I could stop such a heavy ship from falling out of the sky slow enough to make it out unharmed. I was literally out of options untilâ€¦

Suddenly, I had an idea. My powers weren't strong enough to stop the ship's descent, but if there was a way that it could be landedâ€¦

"Hold on!" I shouted to the ship and dove straight out of the clouds and into the ocean at a speed so fast I think I broke the sound barrier. The boom echoed as the icy Northern seas embraced me. Closing my eyes, I concentrated all the powers of the wind around me.

At first, nothing. Then a sudden surge of a storm greeted me. It raised me slowly out of the water about a mile or so away from the edge of the border. The clouds seemed to be mocking me. I grinned back.

"Think you can stop me, magic?"

I directed the water towards the ship, making a large waterslide going towards the ocean. I turned to where the ship was. "Make sure

everything loose is secured! And try not to aim off of the ramp!"

I summoned the power that had come to me when Sandy had died, each time Pitch threatened the lives of others. All the anger and frustration that had been building up inside me burst forward like a tidal wave. With a mighty shout I hurled everything I got from the end of my staff into the stormy funnel.

The Aurora Borealis broke the barrier. It just made the ramp, where it balanced on the platform. I landed on the ship and called for a bit of wind to fill the sails.

And then we were flying down the ice at breakneck speeds.

I was laughing as the force of the wind snapped at everyone on deck. The yetis and Roxy were tied securely to the sides of the ship, North to his post at the wheel as he steered the ship down the icy runway.

Well, it wasn't just a giant slide straight down; I'll admit I had a bit of fun with it. What? It wasn't much, just a few loop-de-loops and a couple of sideways areas; nothing major. The g-force on the last one was tremendous too! Everyone was plastered to the side of the ship. I even think one of the yetis (probably Andy) passed out.

Then came the epic finale I'd always wanted to experience: a wave.

The ship hit the water and a giant wave at least fifty feet high flew over the ship and soaked everyone through as we came to a sudden halt. I was the first to react, jumping straight into the air and spinning quickly to dry off. Well, it was dizzying, but nothing I couldn't handle.

"Ha ha! It worked! Did you see that? Whoo!"

The yetis slowly untangled themselves from the mess of rope. Phil freed Roxy as well, who seemed to huff at me. Okay, so that little ride obviously didn't entertain her. A couple of yetis vanished below decks to find some towels.

North was laughing too. "Well, that was a little different approach."

"I hope you liked the loop-de-loops," I said as I floated back down in front of him, balancing on my staff and mock-bowing.

"Get down from there, silly boy!" he exclaimed, but he was laughing heartily.

Tooth and Bunny came out from below decks. Tooth looked like she had been laughing the whole time; Bunny went straight to the side and retched loudly over deck. Tooth fluttered over to me.

"That was scary at first, but it was really fun!"

"Yeah!" I shout-laughed, punching the air with a fist. "Awesome brakes!"

"You call those brakes?" Bunny asked weakly after wiping off his mouth.

"No, I call them carrots." I grinned. "Relax, Kangaroo, you're still alive. Give it a few more hours and maybe you'll be kicking again!"

"Why you little-"

"Enough!" boomed North. "We will get little done with fighting. Right now, we must make it to Berk without being noticed any more than we can manage."

"No offense, mate, but I think we just made the most noticeable entrance into a forbidden territory of all time. Thanks to _somebody_." He glared. I put my hands in my hoodie pocked and whistled nonchalantly. "Anyway, if we want to keep a low profile, we'll all need to stay on deck at all times. We can't be leaving the ship unless absolutely necessary."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because we don't know where Pitch is yet," replied Tooth. "Until we do, we need to stay hidden from him."

"On a giant boat. Makes sense."

"This isn't funny, mate! This is serious!"

"And I can't do serious too well, can I?"

"By the moon," Bunny cursed before turning to North. "He listens to you! Get some sense into him!"

"I can still hear you, you know," I muttered.

"Bunny is right, Jack. We must keep extra secret," North stated. "Until we find Pitch and are ready to stop him, we should stay close to ship. It is home now. We should only be a day away from Berk, but we won't have much time. Manny's powers will be fading longer we are here."

"Wait, what?"

"It's true," said Tooth. "There are no believers this far north. Without our presence down south the moon will begin to wane. The good thing is that Christmas and Easter are not about to come, and I have my ladies taking care of the teeth. But without Sandy's overall influenceâ€¦"

"The waning process will be faster. Won't it?"

They all confirmed my assumption. I sighed. "Great. So we've got an indefinite amount of time before the Man in the Moon is weak enough for Pitch to take the throne. So we have to find him and stop him before that happens, right?"

"Exactly."

"How hard can it be?"

"Very damn hard, actually. We're in a different world now, mate," said Bunny hoarsely. "We don't get ta play by our rules anymore. Whatever's got power over this slot of land from here on out is the one we've got to stay under the radar from. And I'm guessing it's got somethin' ta do with those dragons that attacked us twice now."

"So we're on our own now?"

Bunny didn't know how to respond. He shrugged and said, "We'll just have to wait and see, Frostbite."

Aurora Borealis: The Northern Sea (Jack's POV)

Night had finally fallen after the afternoon drama. I was almost asleep, lying on my back staring up at the low, wooden ceiling, when I heard a voice.

Jack.

My heart stopped as I bolted up and out of bed. I'd only ever heard that voice one in my life, but the power behind it was undeniable. Why him? Why now?

Grabbing my staff, I flew as fast as I could to the deck. It was abandoned except for Gerald, who was steering the ship. He noticed me and pointed to the crow's nest. I gave him a nod of thanks and went up. I even took the lame way of climbing. No idea why, I just felt like it.

The moon was full. I heard no one, so I cleared my throat. "I thought you didn't have power over this area of the world, MiM."

Silence, then:

You are right, Jack Frost, child of winter. I do not. But what little I do possess was necessary to convey an important message to you.

"A message, huh?" I asked, circling up to the top of the mast with my back to the moon. "For me?"

Indeed.

As I turned back towards the moon, I noticed a single beam of light coming down to the crow's nest. Just as the first time I had seen his figure in Santoff Claussen, the Man in the Moon took his true form. He towered over me in robes of whites and yellows and blues and blacks, billowing around him in an ethereal wind. I landed at his feet, looking up at the mask that veiled his true face. All I could tell were his eyes, so deep and dark I felt like I was drowning in them.

He didn't say much, but I still remember the way his words made me feel. Cold, colder than death. Yet it burned. I didn't understand how much power existed in words, especially names. Not until later.

MiM said to me this, and only this.

_Remember these words, Jack Frost, child of winter: J__Ä³__kul

Frosti._

His presence faded almost immediately after. I fell to the deck, gasping. The strange feeling of being squeezed by his power was gone, but I could still feel the aftermath of it shocking me.

"_JǺ³kul Frosti?" _I groaned. "You talk to me now and all you give me is a riddle? Really?"

But the Man in the Moon was, once again, silent.

* * *

><p>Part II â€" The Vikings

The First Nightmare

Fire.

Everywhere I looked, it loomed before me. Tall, towering spires of heat and red and agony, tinted with the shrieks of fast-moving winds and the blasts of purple flames. The dark shadow that produced the fire circled around in the sky high above me; I could barely make it out through the ashes that were threatening to clog my lungs.

Then the flying shadow dove towards me. It had eyes of amber, glaring and flashing with purpose. I could hear the roar of the flames building up in its mouth and aimed at me. I ran, but to no avail as the force of the fireball hit me in the back and sent me flying onto the stone ground.

I was burning.

I screamed, but no sound came out. The flames were upon me now, lapping away at my body as though it was nothing more than a hunk of cloth.

Faster and faster.

It was upon me, clothes burning up first. I had my arms out in front of me, watching in fascinated horror as my shirt fell away in grey smoke. I could hear the hair on my head shrivel up and fall so my bangs were no longer in my eyes. My hands disintegrated before my eyes when I held them up. My vision was vanishing as my eyes turned to jelly and melted down my face. And I cried as my broken body was charred and turned to ash. Then there was nothing but darkness. It engulfed me as the flames had just moments ago.

Faster still.

I was there, in spirit but not in body.

Then I heard the voice. It was a deep, resonating voice that shook the very core of my existence. I could feel what was left of me tremble like a leaf in an autumn gale. The voice laughed, laughed at me and everything around me: I could tell. It was not a kind voice. It was a cold and cruel voice.

And suddenly I was scared. I was more scared than I had ever been in my life.

My now-hypothetical limbs curled up into the fetal position, my fake hands covering my fake ears. Suddenly it was so cold, too cold. I could feel myself freezing by the very presence of the voice and its laughter. Everything was spinning so fast that I felt sick, dizzy, broken.

Too fast.

And then it all stopped.

I floated down, down, down; the falling never seemed to end. All around me was a mess of colors, swirling in nauseating patterns and seemed to stab me. It was as if everything beautiful in the world had been squeezed together to create an ugly memory of its beauty. It was now distorted and ruined and wrong.

Then the bottom of the colors came. Not I was surrounded by pure white. There was no direction, but I stood at what I considered the ground, realizing my body was back. But it was only a shadow of myself, shaded black on all limbs. I stared at what was my outline in awed revulsion.

I heard the laugh again. A hideous, piercing sound.

Black blossomed from my hands and painted the area pure and undiluted black. It destroyed everything, all the white, and I could hear it screaming so loud that my ears bled. The scarlet of my blood was a stark contrast to the black and white.

There was only one spot of white light far away. Suddenly, I was running towards it. As fast as I could. Trying something " anything " to escape this horror. And just as I reached for this escape, it vanished before my very eyes.

I was trapped.

Shivering with terror, I turned around to face my offender. Nothing. Then I felt a presence by my shoulder. One of a tall woman leaning down next to my ear. I froze, this time unable to move by my own paralyzing thoughts. Something about her was eerily familiar, but I couldn't figure out what. I reached back to find her.

But she was not there. All I felt was another hand. And then I realized that hand was my own, contorted and circling around me. Strangling myself with my own grip.

I was choking, unable to make a sound. Part of it was my hands. A larger part was my fear.

"_Help!" I choked out to someone, anyone._

I heard the presence sneer. She came by my face, just out of my peripheral, her hair tickling the back of my neck like a thousand spider's feet. She giggled.

"_Welcome to the real world, Hiccup."_

Berk: The Forge (Hiccup's POV)

I woke up panting, drenched in cold sweat with eyes that couldn't focus on much of anything. The world around me was blurry, shadows sweeping everywhere. Just seeing the shadows reminded me of the terror I had felt the whole time.

It took a few long, deep breaths to calm me down again. It didn't work, to say the least. I finally stumbled half-blind out of my workshop and into the hard dirt. It was chilly today. The sun was barely up, meaning most everyone was probably still eating breakfast or out fishing at sea. The thought of both made me nauseous so I went home.

The place was dark and empty, but the familiarity of the room gave me some comfort. I went upstairs to my room and flopped on the bed. There wasn't much in my room. It consisted of a window and a door, the floor just a mess of wooden planks I had nailed together, a bed I crafted, a desk I also crafted, and an odd shelf that was falling apart. It mostly contained extra notebooks, charcoal pencils, and books that I'd accumulated over the years.

I'm not sure why I came home. Maybe there was something here that I needed aside from fresh clothes and soap. In the end, I couldn't recall what. I grabbed those from the basket under my desk and went out.

There are several smaller rivers circling around Berk. None make it out of the forest, but we do our laundry in those streams. On the rare occasion we bathe. Vikings aren't known for their cleanliness; I'm an exception. Something about soap and feeling good is something seldom enjoy this far north.

I stripped and jumped in. The water was, as I expected, frigid. Still, I swam down to the bottom. It wasn't very far, but it was a good stamina exercise. I tend to take baths in the faster-moving rivers because of that. I actually want to be strong, despite my obviously incapable build.

Taking the heaviest rock I could manage, I kicked back to the surface, gasping as my head broke the waters. Taking said rock to the shoreline, I hung my dirty shirt and pants onto it and began to scrub them down with the bar of soap. It dissolved easily into the fabric and a trail of brown bubbles lazily floated away. I followed by rubbing the soap rigorously across my body and in my hair. I sighed as I began to rinse off; it was good to be clean.

"Hiccup?"

Oh, not that voice!

"Astrid!" I jumped and quickly kneeled in the water, hoping for the bubbles to cover up my *unseemly* areas. "Have you never heard of privacy before?"

"I have." She walked out from behind a tree and into full view. One of her eyebrows was raised above her head. I realized then how ridiculous I must've looked. I was crouched in a river naked with soap and grime running down my face and torso. Not to mention I was a twig with no muscles.

Astrid looked me down once more while I turned red in the face. "What

in the world are you doing?"

"Bathing." Right away that sounded lame.

She obviously thought so too. "I didn't peg you as the type."

"I didn't either."

Astrid smirked. "Well, as for your privacy, you might like to know I usually take a bath here after a morning workout."

"Oh." Well that was embarrassing. I took her spot AND she worked out. "I guess I'll get going then."

"No, you can stay. But only if you promise not to look. Because if you do, I'll kill you."

I noticed she had her axe slung over her shoulder easily. Something in her tone made me know Astrid was serious. I nodded and turned around quickly, trying not to think about the fact that she would be bathing naked behind me.

I heard small splashes notifying me where she'd waded in. Astrid eventually stopped walking where I figured she was perhaps a body's length away from me. The smell of herbal soap soon reached my nostrils.

"Soâ€¦" I began awkwardly. "You like to take baths too?"

"I take them because they help me think," Astrid stated. "It's hard to do that when you and everyone around you smells like they haven't bathed in months."

"Probably because most of them haven't," I remarked.

That got a real laugh out of her. "But you do."

"We're not all Ruff and Tuff."

"So why are you taking a bath now where I usually bathe during a time I gather you usually don't?"

I didn't reply.

"Please tell me you weren't watching me before."

"W-w-w-what? No!" I jumped up to face her, only to remember I shouldn't have. I was lucky; Astrid had her back to me. I sat back down embarrassed. "No, I have never spied on a girl before. I've never even seenâ€¦you knowâ€¦girl parts and stuffâ€¦"

Then it hit me. "Wait, people have spied on you before?"

"Mostly your stupid cousin," she answered nonchalantly.

Sounds like Snot. I nodded vigorously, later remembering she couldn't see me, so replied lamely with "Yeah."

There was an awkward silence developing. I moved only to finish wiping the sudsy grime off of me. I heard Astrid do the same. By then

I was freezing. The river was becoming uncomfortably similar to the lake in my nightmare. I stood to get out, pulling on my fresh clothes and wringing out the washed ones.

"I'll see you around then."

"Hiccup, wait."

I stopped in my tracks, back still turned towards her. Astrid got out of the water. There was a moment of quiet when she was probably putting her clothes back on. After that she came and stood before me.

It was really interesting how different people looked when all of their emotional guards were down. Astrid looked innocent. Really, she did. All of her hair was down and around her shoulders, bangs plastered to her face, clothes not-perfect from rushing to put them on. Her eyes watched me with a keenness I'd never seen before.

"Last night" she started. This was bad.

I played dumb. "Did something happen last night?"

"I saw you at the forge. Don't even lie to me. I went back and found the scuff marks in front of the window. I know it was you who was dragged back."

I remained silent.

She continued. "And every day now you vanish. No one sees you in the afternoons, before or after class, in the workshop, nothing. The only person who ever has contact with you is Fishlegs, and that's if you actually stick around after dinner. I know there's something going on. I don't know what it is, and I don't know if I can be trusted with it, but if there's something you want to tell me"

Astrid trailed off. I didn't know what to say. Most of me was ready to break off all connections with her. But there was a small, infinitesimally miniscule part of me that wanted to tell her everything, from when I first met Toothless to the nightmare. And the more I thought about it, the more I wanted to tell her.

I wanted her trust.

But I knew what she would do. Astrid was a better Viking than I'd ever dream to be. One mention of a dragon and her axe would be at both my throat and Toothless's. If I wasn't killed, I would be disowned and forced to live a life as an outcast. I'd lose everything.

So I replied tightly, "It's nothing. Sorry for encroaching on your bath."

Astrid's eyes became hard again, like two pieces of blue flint. I could see the true Vikingess in her emerging. Something about it was disheartening. There went any chance of a friendship, let alone a relationship. She nodded sharply. "So that's your final response."

"It is. I'm sorry." I repeated. "There are some things I have to do on my own."

"Rightâ€|right." She stepped out of my way. "I guess I might see you at breakfast, then."

"Probably not."

"Then at dinner."

"Dinner then."

I left to hang my wet clothes in the house. Next stop, the docks for a basket of fish. Then the cove. There would probably be some wild berries I could snack on on my way there. If not, I'm sure Toothless would be more than willing to make me a fire.

I cringed at the thought, the nightmare resurfacing as though it were rising out from under a frozen lake. The last thing I wanted to encounter was fire, especially that kind.

Berk: The Cove (Toothless's POV)

Something was definitely wrong with Hiccup. Granted, I observed it was normal enough for him to get lost in thought, but this was something different. I could sense something, and I didn't like it.

Our soul bond was weaker.

This had been a surprise for me. After all, it had only been getting stronger with each passing day. I tried to greet him earlier when he came in, but I couldn't even sense his presence despite the fact that he stood before me like any other time. Hiccup seemed more cautious around me too. His own greeting was half-hearted. His eyes were weary. I didn't like this.

He didn't speak either. Another rarity. Hiccup always chattered away. I admit I found it quite annoying at first, but I've come to gradually accept this as a normal occurrence. His silence was, in its own ways, deadly.

_What's wrong? _I tried to ask him, but at once I could feel this wasn't ordinary either. The soul bondâ€|

I narrowed my eyes and allowed my vision to go blank, focusing instead on the colors of the spirit world. Everything around me when grey-tone. Except for Hiccup: he was a dull gold. The most miniscule of threads connected from his heart and soul to mine.

I blinked back to the normal world, stunned. The soul bond was all but gone now! Alarmed I leapt to where the boy was sitting. He flinched â€" actually flinched â€" away from me. I retaliated by thwacking him in the back of the head with my tail.

"Ow!" A hand went up to where I hit him, obvious shock written across his features, "What in the name of the gods was that for?"

Instead of answering (because I knew that would merit to absolutely nothing) I pressed my snout to his free hand. My eyes closed as I

focused on the day we first made a connection, the power I felt from the official bond. Dragons have sharp memory; mine was only the best.

His hand was cool against my snout, fingers soft and familiar. It was a comforting feeling for me. I allowed the flow of the memory warm us both. The power of the connection seemed to hum. I sighed. I could tell Hiccup felt it too; he gasped a bit, but didn't move away.

Then as fast as it had come, it was gone. But I could feel his mind again. It was weaker than before, which was odd and unnerving, but it was better than nothing. I pulled away and watched Hiccup. He was staring at his hand. No doubt it was still tingling: humans have more precise feelings of pain, so it probably stung him a bit. His green eyes turned towards me.

"Hey bud."

I couldn't help but scoff. _Is that all you could come up with? 'Hey bud?'_

He frowned. "What else was I supposed to say?" Then Hiccup paused. "I can hear you againâ€|"

I nodded vigorously. He sighed.

"Gods, this is getting more and more confusing."

_Something happened to weaken our connection, _I said. _Something that affected you, I think._

His eyes asked the question his lips would not. 'Why me?'

Why you indeed. Perhapsâ€|just maybe it's because of me. Because of our connection. You're human, more easily susceptible to outside influences. No doubt some force of some sort attacked our link from you and tried to weaken it. It was all but gone just now.

Hiccup didn't say a word. He just stared back at his feet. I nudged his hand again gently.

Speak your mind, Hiccup.

"â€|don't laugh, okay?"

I frowned. _Why would I laugh at something that's bothering you?_

"Because you have in the past!" Okay, he had a point. "And becauseâ€|"

Because?

"Because this is a bit childish." Hiccup took a deep breath. "Last night, I had a nightmare."

A nightmare?

"It was so strange. I don't think I could possibly explain it."

_Well, it doesn't hurt to try, _ I said. _Does it?_

"I guess notâ€|"

Hiccup did his best. The more he spoke, the more broken he looked. By the end, he had his eyes hidden in his hands, kneeling on the ground. Emotionally, I could feel just how broken he felt. It wasn't comforting. It made me afraid for him.

And it made me angry beyond belief.

_That was no ordinary nightmare! _I growled. _This was definitely the witchcraft of the Dark One!_

"The Dark One?"

He who is cold and of shadows. He who allied himself with the Queen to trap us all!

Hiccup cleared his throat. "I'm beyond confused right now."

I sighed. He wasn't ready to know the truth about them yet. Not yet. This didn't concern him as long as our soul bond wasn't destroyed.

It's nothing; don't concern yourself with it. More importantly, we should test out the fin, now that it's been finalized.

Hiccup was immediately in better spirits, talking about what he had done to perfect the flying mechanism. Though I barely understood a word of it, it was comforting. Hopefully this would be the last time a nightmare by the Dark One would affect him, but I knew deep down this wasn't the last time he would strike. He would probably come back again, and locate me if possible.

But again, this was something Hiccup wasn't up for. Right now, we needed to fly. To fly and become one again. I smiled at the thought and followed him towards the exit to the cove.

Next stop, the open sky.

Berk: The Docks

Only one boat had made it.

Two-thirds of the original raid party was accounted for, and a good quarter of them were injured.

Those on shore had already clambered around the docks, waiting to see who had made it and who had been lost. As the ship docked, a heavy silence came over both parties.

The injured were immediately taken to the Elder's cabin for treatment. All the other able-bodied Vikings climbed out one at a time. Stoick waited until the injured were gone before offering a hand up and out of the tiny boat.

Gobber was waiting for him; today his hand was an oar. He took Stoick's things and headed up the boardwalk with him. There was a

moment of silence.

"Well," he said, trying to lighten the mood, "at least you found the Nest."

"Not even close," growled the latter.

"Okay thenâ€|"

"Any good news on your end."

"'Fraid not. There's still not enough food to sustain the village over the winter. And I heard some muttering about the snows being late. This could be a bad omen according to the seniors. The Elder has said nothing on the matter, though.

"On the plus side, no more raids. So no more casualties."

Stoick waved the away. "Any other reports?"

"We got a raven the other day." He sighed. "It was from Bertha. Apparently there's been a final raid in her village south of here just after you had left. She's lost her daughter."

"Camicaze?" Stoick tried not to react. She was a fierce girl and a good fighter, not to mention Hiccup's betrothed. "Killed orâ€|?"

"Taken. Whether that's a good thing or not is in the hands of the gods."

Stoick sighed. "Please tell me you have some good news."

"Well, if it's about your parenting troubles being over thenâ€|yes."

At that moment several Viking who hadn't gone on the raid were running down the wharf towards their chief.

"Congratulations, Stoick!" bellowed the first woman. "Everyone is so relieved!"

"Out with the old, in with the new, eh?" said a second.

The third was only just audible as he ran off. "No one'll miss that old nusaince."

Stoick was barely able to comprehend what he just heard. Hiccupâ€|was Hiccupâ€|had he beenâ€|

"He's gone," the chief choked out.

"Yeahâ€|" Gobber said hesitantly, "most afternoons. But who can blame him. It's hard for him to walk through the village without being swarmed by his new fans."

Stoick's expression had undergone several changes, from hurt to confused to bewildered. He stopped Gobber with a hand on his shoulder. "Hiccup?"

"Who knew, eh?" Gobber laughed. "He's excelled tremendously since beginning training. He's got the way with the beasts!"

And in that moment, Stoick felt as though all of his prayers had finally been answered. He looked to the heavens, holding in all of his emotions as expected of a chief, and thanked the gods silently. Gobber watched this all unfold with amused silence. He'd known his friend better than any Viking, and he knew exactly what Stoick was thinking.

"Come now, he won't be back 'til after dinner. You can hound him about his techniques then!"

"Right."

And the two men headed back into the village.

Above Raven's Point (Hiccup's POV)

The wind snapped from all sides, pushing my hair out of my face. It was a little past midday and the sun was high in the sky. It, for once, was beautiful; warm and sunny with a few stray clouds lazing across a sky of pure cerulean.

Toothless and I were gliding high above the mountain that made up the southern side of Berk. The trees looked no bigger than my fingernails. To be honest, my heart was thrumming in my throat. I was desperately trying not to pass out from the dizziness caused by the altitude.

"Okay there bud? We're gonna take this nice and slow," I said, patting him on the neck. "Alright, here we go. Position three!" I concurred with my cheat sheet. "No, four."

I didn't realize Toothless was rolling his eyes. He leaned as I angled the fin. Sideways, we flew in a slow circle. I made sure everything was secure. Then, as a gust of wind began to pull us out of sync, Toothless righted himself.

I found I was smiling.

Taking one last look behind me to make sure the fin was secure, I turned back forward and took a deep breath.

"Okay, it's go time, it's go time," I muttered and we dove.

My feet clicked down to position five, making the fin streamline, going down. Toothless was capable of changing altitudes without the use of one fin (directions were the problem, that and stabilizing) but he went faster if the positions were right. The wind practically shrieked as the air pressure increased. I was giddy with excitement as the feeling of my stomach leaving my body engulfed me. I was shouting breathily, "C'mon buddy! C'mon buddy!"

Toothless let out a cry in response, speeding up slightly before righting himself in a glide just above the ocean. I felt a spray as some seawater came off from his grazing wing. We flew through rocks so ancient that the sea had worn them down to pillars. I couldn't help but glance up; gulls were cawing above us.

It was so surreal. And it was thrilling.

"Yes, it worked!"

Smiling, Toothless and I flew off to our next obstacle. This was a collection of smaller rock fixtures rising out of the sea. Easy compared to coming out of a dive correctly. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case for me. Call me an idiot, see that I care. I know Toothless's still mad about it.

Instead of using the tailfin's controls, I did my natural human response of leaning back, a technique I had perfected since childhood (when all the other young Vikings would pick on me). It works against fists, but not when you're flying at rocks.

We hit with a smash. More accurately, Toothless hit with a smash; I winced. "Sorry!"

The next rock came to our right, the other side. I did the same thing. "That was my fault."

That wasn't the correct response to give an angry Night Fury with two bruises on the side of its head. Toothless smacked on the cheek hard with his feeler-thing.

"Ow! Okay, I get it! I'm on it" I looked down at my sheet. "Going upâ€|position four, no, three."

Three was correct. We went straight up until we were past the clouds, higher than any bird flew. It was cold and humid and the air was definitely thinner, but it was something else. I was hooting. "Yeah! Go. baby! Oh this is amazing! The wind in myâ€|"

Then everything went wrong.

"CHEAT SHEET! STOP!"

The wind, as you probably inferred, plucked the cheat sheet off of my saddle and away from my grasp. We did stop. As we reached out apogee, I was able to grab the loose-leaf parchment, but my hooks came off at the same time. I met Toothless's eyes, which were filled with horror, for one moment. Then that moment ended and we were freefalling.

"No!" I screamed as we fell. The wind was now not-friendly, the puffy clouds I had been admiring a thing that obscured my vision. They seemed to continue as we fell. "Oh gods! Oh gods! Oh no!"

I heard Toothless growl from above me. He shot down until we were falling at roughly the same pace. By doing so, however, he lost control.

"Y-you've gotta kinda angle yourself." He tried, but manage only in spinning rapidly. "No no no no no no. Come down towards me! Come down towardsâ€|ack!"

His tail slapped my quite brutally in the face. I'm surprised it didn't leave a mark.

We were almost to land now, the place right in between the

low-gliding clouds and the mountain's peak. Taking the cheat sheet in my hand, I put it in my mouth and held it with my teeth. I needed both hands if I wanted a chance at getting back onto Toothless without dying. I finally was able to grab hold of my saddle. It took a few tries between my fumbling fingers, but I made it.

Toothless let out a feral screech as he noticed me clipping back in. Once I was secure, I leaned back down into our descent. We were still falling fast, adrenaline singing through my veins like liquid lightning. Toothless spun a few times until he was able to find a point of balance. As he did, we went through one last blurry skyline towards a heavy fog.

The trees were right there. Death was right there.

Without even thinking, I automatically leaned back, feet slamming into position six. Toothless's wings unfurled with a snap, wind dragging so hard that I could see streams of clouds running off of them. We were literally an arm's length away from smashing into the trees under us. The pressure seemed to increase at an unnatural rate.

And then I saw the twisting maze of now-lethal rocks approaching us as we neared the sea.

Oh gods.

Above Raven's Point (Toothless's POV)

This was it.

I'd heard somewhere that a downed dragon was a dead dragon. This was true. No dragon had tried to fly again after that, but there was a first for everything. And now I was the first dragon to have tried and failed.

I glanced up. Hiccup had his cheat sheet in one hand, the thing fluttering so violently that there was no way he could decipher the writing. Even I knew that. The rocks were growing larger now, nearly to us. If it wasn't for the fact that I had my wings out to stabilize our descent, I would've tucked them in and prepared for a painful impact.

And then a transformation occurred.

Time seemed to slow down as I watched Hiccup. His fear from the oncoming danger vanished, replaced by a confident glimmer in his eyes. The most miniscule of smiles formed on his thin lips as he leaned forward in the saddle, grabbing the front of the seat tightly. The cheat sheet flew from his hand and over his shoulder, forgotten.

I felt a foreign heat grow in my chest, brighter and more painful than anything I'd ever felt before. But I bit it back; I was a Night Fury, not some common reptile. I would prevail. Embracing this inner fire, I leaned forward with Hiccup, feeling him ready himself.

We breathed together, hovering in a wave of surreal existence. Our lives hung in the balance, yet I didn't feel any of that. The fire was coursing through my veins, thrumming with life and truth and

power. Suddenly, the pain was no longer there. In its place was a shimmering memory of warmth, one I recognized as Hiccup's. His soul. In that moment, I felt his entirety connected to mine in a way I'd could have never in a million moons fathomed.

And then the moment ended.

The rocks grew even more ominously than before, but all thoughts of death had vanished. In their place was one thought:

Fly.

And we did as one.

Left. Right. Left. Right again, left again. Down. Soon I couldn't tell if the thoughts were mine or not. It wasn't just my movements; they were no longer just Hiccup's either. It was as though we had identical ideas in the air. The flow of my turns was natural, as though I'd been flying with a rider all of my life.

With Hiccup. He leaned back and forth with our flight, not trying to manipulate it in any way. The only indication I had that he was indeed still controlling was the slight click from the foot pedals above the roar of the wind.

I rolled upside-down in the air through a hole in the rocks. Hiccup's body was flat against mine; he popped up and snapped me back upright without a thought. Neither of us was thinking. We were doing. It was like breathing or speaking: natural.

The flight had only lasted for a matter of moments as we shot through the last of the blackened rocky crags. Already the mist had cleared. We glided over the ocean. Alive. We were alive, unharmed, and very much astounded by what had just occurred.

I looked up at Hiccup, who was looking straight ahead in shock. Then his spindly arms went straight above his head as he gave a very loud and equally breathless shout. I smiled, understanding exactly how he felt. And in a more technical way than before.

It was there. The soul bond. Stronger and closer than it had ever been. It was as though we had been made into one functioning unit. It wasn't the human and the dragon anymore. Sky to earth, it wasn't even dragon and rider! This was more than just testing out how to fly. This was actual flying! We had been flying! As one!

A _complete_ soul bond.

I laughed, shooting a bolt of flame in celebration. I didn't realize how much this would affect Hiccup.

"Aw, c'mon!" he groaned loudly as we were engulfed.

Berk: The Shore (Hiccup's POV)

I blinked rapidly, trying to stop my eyelids from sticking wide open. It worked, though I felt a few singed eyebrows falling out as I did. In fact, just about everything I had been wearing was burned at some point. The ends of my hair would need trimming too once I was able to get it out of its blown-back position. It was stiffer than tree bark,

I swear!

I'd caught a glance at myself in the water's reflection after we'd landed; Toothless had laughed so hard while I yelled at him. Seriously, I wasn't presentable like this! What would everyone think if I walked into town looking like that? Hopefully, I could pass a silly story like coming into contact with a Timberjack or something, but it was highly unlikely.

I heard a hacking sound and saw that Toothless had regurgitated half of his fish for me again; this time it was the head.

"No thanks, I'm all good." To make a point, I even gestured at the fish I had roasting over the fire that he'd made for me to dry off with.

_Whatever, _he muttered.

I was going to reply when I heard the flutter of wings. The two of us looked up to see a group of three Terrible Terrors making their way towards the rocky shore we were resting at. They landed and immediately began to scuttle towards us.

"Huh, Terrors," I noted. "I wonder what they want with us?"

Toothless growled from the back of his throat, wrapping his front paws around the fish we'd caught protectively. _Filthy scavengers! Away with you!_

"Aw, don't be like that. They're just Terrors. And they're adorable!"

_I seriously doubt your judgment at the moment, _Toothless deadpanned.

"Yeah yeah, I love you too, bud," I grumbled.

The first went straight for Toothless's fish. He growled and frightened it away, but not before its companion was able to get a hold of one. The head Toothless had regurgitated, to be specific. As it started to nibble on the end, one of its companions attacked. The two got into a spat, firing flames at each other.

I watched in fascination. Toothless just looked bored. Then he turned as one of his fish moved away. The third Terror had somehow managed to sneak past him and took it by the tail. Toothless retaliated immediately, grabbing the head of the fish and holding it in place as the green dragon tried desperately to pull it away.

I could tell Toothless was teasing it, showing off his strength. Almost immediately he became bored. Allowing the Terror another pull he yanked the fish away and swallowed, laughing tauntingly. The Terror spat out the ends of the tail, which was all it had gotten, and began to claw the ground, growling. Its chest puffed out as it readied its attack. Then when it opened its mouth, Toothless shotâ€"more like spatâ€"a bolt of purple flame into it.

The Terror went down, smoke furling out of its nostrils. The sight was a mix between comical, pitying, and downright funny. Chuckling, I

took my fish and tossed it over to the little dragon.

"Here you go. That's to apologize for my idiot dragon."

Idiot? You dare call me that?

I ignored him. I'd probably get a scolding for that later.

The Terror ate up the fish in literally one go. It didn't even bite it, just swallowed. I'm not sure how it was able to manage that. Then the dragon looked at me in a friendly way. I smiled back. It sidled over and curled up by my hand, purring like a content domestic animal. I stroked it along its scaly green back, thinking.

Then it hit me.

"Everything we know about youâ€¦is wrong."

As I said those words, the sudden realization was a bit staggering. I'd known for a while that dragons weren't what we Vikings made them out to be at first. Meeting Toothless changed that. But all the others, they were just as innocent.

So why do they take our food? Why do they kill us? Why are they focused on the children?

I groaned at the conflict building up inside of me. Killing was almost explainable. Self-defense. No one would want to take of a Viking's might (and stench) head-on. Food, on the other hand, was strange to me. Sure, sheep are good, but there're all kinds of other meats dragons could probably eat with less of a hassle. Like fish. Or elk. Even some large birds. So why us?

And why the kids?

I opened my mouth to ask Toothless about that when I saw a shadow pass over the horizon. I stood up and walked over to the edge of the shore, staring into the blinding sun.

Toothless looked up from his meal. _What is it?_

"I thought I saw something over yonder."

_Well, I didn't, _he said with a shrug.

Then I saw it again. I pointed. "There! Do you see it? It looked like some kind of ship."

Toothless looked at me, puzzled.

I walked back over to him. "Come on, let's go take a look." When he gave me an indignant look, I asked, "What? Don't tell me you're not curious as to what a mysterious ship is doing right off the island of Berk."

_I'm not, _he stated.

"Can't you at least take me to see it?" I begged, then I bribed. "I'll give you an extra basket of fish tomorrow."

No.

"Please?"

I've got my fish and it's fabulous. Why should I need more when you'll take me hunting again tomorrow? Perhaps we can find some real meat in the forest.

"For the last time, going where Astrid, or any other Viking for that matter, is around is too risky!"

So what? It's not like they could hurt us.

"But they could recognize me?"

So make a disguise. You humans are good at crafting things, right?

"That's not the point!"

He huffed. _I don't want to fly. I want to sit here, enjoy the view, and eat._

"Ugh, lazy dragon!"

Insufferable human!

We glared at each other, then Toothless started to laugh. My eyes narrowed. "What?"

_You really are something, aren't you? Such a stubborn, pig-headed boy when you really want something! _He continued to chuckle, mouth turning up on the ends. I had to hand it to him; he was really getting the hang of smiling.

Still, I didn't appreciate being laughed at. "Is that an insult?"

I didn't mean it to be. Sorry if it was.

His apology was sincere. I smiled and sat back down. "Okay then. But I still really want to check out that ship!"

_After I've finished eating. Don't rush me, _Toothless said while swallowing his fish. Damn, telepathy was really useful in these situations.

"Wait, you'll take me?" I didn't believe him at first.

He nodded. _Well, of course. I don't think I could stand your whining if I never took you._

"Gee, thanks," I muttered. He snorted.

The Terrors soon left, flying south. All, that was, except one. I watched as the one that curled up against me flew north-northwest. Not that I really cared, but it struck me as a bit odd that the one pack animal was leaving the rest of its group.

Toothless stood up and gestured for me to get on. I jumped onto the

saddle without a hitch in my step. It took a single fluid motion to buckle in.

You've become more agile, he noted.

"Yeah, it's called chasing you around every time I say the word 'flying,'" I teased.

He retaliated by taking off straight into the sky. It threw me off, literally. If it wasn't for my vest hooks, I would've surely fallen. I got my revenge, though. I turned Toothless's fin so he was flipped upside-down. Toothless shrieked and tried to right himself. We barely managed control before crashing into the ocean.

Toothless shot out angrily as I laughed.

What in sky's name were you thinking! You could've drowned us if you weren't careful!

"Relax, we came out unharmed," I stated.

He slapped me in the face for the second time with his feelers (we agreed to call them feelers since they literally felt the air around him; Toothless was saying something about receiving signals from somewhere, but I wasn't really sure what he meant).

"Ow! Okay, I'm sorry."

Of course you are. I hit you.

"Thanks," I said sarcastically. Toothless chuckled and we flew off towards the receding ship.

* * *

><p>WARNING: LONG- \$\$ AUTHOR'S NOTE WITH IMPORANT INFORMATION!
(okay, not so important stuff first)_

:'D

I finally wrote the soul bond! Oh, I'm so happy!

And I was trying to portray Astrid as less of a b*tch. I'm sick and tired of people telling me she's a whore and deserves to die. (Then again, just about all of my friends ship Toothcup).

_On a completely unrelated note, I got to see Star Trek Into Darkness opening weekend! OMG BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH; I've loved him since Sherlock, but this!

>*the feels~ the feels~ squeeEEEEEEEE~*

â€|_anywayâ€|now that I'm done with fanboying in the cornerâ€|

>(the important stuff)

**I have two announcements.**

_Firstly, this is my last update for a little while. I will be unable to update for the entire month of June because I will be vacationing/visiting family in Japan. I'm actually going to the

airport tomorrow really-freaking-early-morning, so I'm lucky I got this chapter done in time! :D
>I know I've had months where I didn't update, but this one is a legitimate reason: I will not have access to Internet or a computer for the majority of the time. I'll have occasional email and PMing capabilities so I'll see all the beautiful or ugly reviews anyone wants to leave. And even that's pushing it; Japan has surprisingly low WiFi availability.

Secondly, I want to make this story more interesting by having input. Please leave a review if you want me to go into a specific character's past or have them more actively involved with the main plot. I know I've personally wanted to have a bit more on the other major Vikings, but I'm not too keen on doing it without everyone else's opinions. It'll diverge from the main plot, but it would be something else to go on with how each person became who they were (in my imagination). Give me a heads-up if you want this as well and have ideas for characterization; I'm open to it all.

That is that. Thanks to everyone for their continual support. See you in a month or so!

_And don't forget to review if you have a chance!
:D_

~Sushi

12. First Encounters

Hi! Miss me?

_I received a distressed please update, and how can I refuse you lovely peoples? You've all been waiting so patiently for this chapter, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for that. Now let's get this started! Our two heroes shall *finally* meet! Fanfare! No? Okay, fine, just read. _;)

P.S. The chapters will no longer be divided into two parts; it's all one big happy collage now!

**EDIT:** Big thanks to **Atem's Sister Atea** for helping me sort out some time measurement confusion in this chapter. I kinda-sorta-maybe-accidentally-without-meaning-to made the Vikings sound waaaaay more primitive than they actually were, and she was a big help for that. :)

* * *

><p>12 " First Encounters

* * *

><p>The Northern Sea: Aurora Borealis (Jack's POV)

For once I was just having fun. Fun is good, right? I mean, I hadn't done that in a while, so it was good to chill with everyone.

Well, not quite everyone. North and the yetis were the only ones actually working; they were standing around the steering wheel having

a very heated discussion over several important-looking maps. When I'd asked about them an hour ago, North gave me a hasty answer "something about planning routes for present-deliver this Christmas or something."

I left them to that after freezing a few passing elves and steeling their cookies, of course. What? Those things are everywhere! Then I went to see what everyone else was up to.

Tooth was washing her blue jacket. It was still slightly stained and singed on the edges from the attack in Canadia. I knocked on the doorframe to get her attention. She immediately turned with a bright smile on her face.

"Jack! Hi, come in! I was just about make some tea, if you'd like."

"I'd love some," I answered.

She beckoned me in and had me sit on her rug. I offered to help with the tea, but she refused. Baby fluttered from her perch on the window ledge to settle comfortably on my shoulder. I rubbed her cheek before sitting cross-legged on the colorful purple-and-green rug with my staff by my side.

I liked Tooth's room. It reminded me of her palace, with the same grace and sophistication. However, I couldn't say the same for Tooth. Of course, even she had some less-graceful leftovers from her past. Because of the low ceiling she couldn't fly in her room, so had to resolve with walking. Which made her trip on the edge of the rug when she was carrying the teapot over.

I cried out a bit when a splash of hot water flew from the spout and onto my exposed hand. It didn't help that I managed to bang my head on the lowest supporting beam when I jumped up. The pain subsided almost immediately "power of being an instant ice pack, I guess" but it still throbbed slightly, and I could feel a lump developing on the back of my head.

"Ow!"

"Oh Moon, Jack! I'm so sorry! Are you okay? Here, let me see."

I rubbed my sore head sheepishly and showed her my hand. Its entire back was an angry red color, which contrasted interestingly with my light skin. But as we both stared the wound began to pale and heal to a shiny blue-white. Ice fringed the gradually shrinking edge.

"Looks like I'll be okay," I stated. "It takes a lot more firepower to burn me seriously. Sorry for giving you such a fright."

"No, you're fine. I'm just glad I didn't have to send you to Bunny for healing. No doubt he would blame you for the entire thing!"

I laughed. "Got that right! Though I didn't know he was a doctor."

"He knows a bit about herbal remedies, being an earth magic specialist."

"Makes sense, I guess."

Tooth quickly poured the tea, adding milk and sugar with nimble fingers. She handed me my cup first though with a lot of caution. I took it gingerly and watched as it began to freeze like my hot-cold chocolate Gerard brought for me every morning.

Seeing that I was okay (with a bit of reassurance on my part) she took her own tea.

"Is there a reason you came to visit, Jack? Not that I don't mind the company."

I shrugged. "I'm curious about Berk. Since you're the only one on this ship that knows anything about it, I figured I should ask you."

"Well Jack, I'm not sure what to tell you. It's not a place I've ever set foot in. The only reason I know about it is because of my ladies began collecting teeth from there. How they got through the border is even a mystery for me."

"You mean there never was a Berk when you were still out in the field?" I asked.

Tooth took a sip of tea and nodded. "My ladies first began to bring teeth from there around two hundred and eighty-or-so years ago. And they were in disastrous shape! It's like the poor children had never heard of toothpaste. I haven't seen that many yellows since the Dark Ages!"

"What," I asked, "did Pitch exactly do during the Dark Ages?"

Tooth frowned. "Why are you asking?"

"I'm just not filled in on the details, I guess."

"Well, the story isn't that interesting. Basically, people then lived in fear. It was everywhere. Fear of starvation, fear of disease, fear of being kidnapped. Even simple things like not being able to afford food and clothing, or a drought ruining a year's worth of crops. But most of all, there was a fear of death. And Pitch fed on that. He became so powerful that there was no hope for anyone."

"Until MiM intervened."

"Until MiM intervened," she agreed. "That's when Sandy was born. He, as I'm sure he showed you, suffered. That was life for many other children then. The Man in the Moon knew that, and used that to his advantage. That's why the children have been so important to our purposes. We Guardians all hold a piece of them, in a sense."

I nodded and finished off my tea. Tooth poured me another glass and sat still. She waited for me to speak first.

"I think," I said finally, "that there's something really wrong about all of this. The entire missionâ€¦ isn't it too dangerous?"

"Why do you say this?"

I set down my cup. "I don't know. Something about Pitch and Berk is bugging me. He was trying to make me come with him. There's the whole deal with Berk's isolation and the border. Why do they exist? And how was Pitch able to get past them?"

Tooth frowned. "Now that you say it like thatâ€¦"

I continued. "He was also babbling on about some queen or something, saying he's been plotting for three hundred year up north. 'A beast of ash and fire,' he said. Then he went on about the children. Something's going on with the children up there. I don't know what, but I feel like we need to go and check."

"I couldn't agree more, but right now it's safer to stay on the ship. North still has some use of his magic because we're so close to Santoff Clausen. He's put a shield around us that should make us invisible to Pitch. Though if he does has as much control of the area as we think he does, then he probably already knows we're here."

"So you're saying it is too dangerous then."

"I am."

We sat in uncomfortable silence. Tooth sighed and added softly, "The rest of us are not made to fight both Fearlings and dragons. You're the only one with an edge in battle."

I rubbed the spot on my hand that I had burned, now completely healed. "Yeah, I guess."

I talked a bit longer about trivial things before helping her to repair the outfit, excusing myself right after, and went to bug Bunny.

He, for once, wasn't puking his guts out. And he didn't look that annoyed to see me, so bonus!

"What's up, Frostbite?"

"Nothing much, Kangaroo." I leaned on the doorframe to his room (because I went below decks). "Can I come in?"

"I dunno. _Can_ you?"

I rolled my eyes. "Enough with the grammar!" Though I did correct myself. "May I?"

He waved me in. This was the first time I'd ever been in his room so I took my time when looking around. It was set up the same as mine: bed, desk, chair, shelves, hardwood floors, circular windows. What was different, though, was that the walls and ceiling were all covered in paintings. As I took a closer look, I realized they were all Bunny's careful brushstrokes.

The right wall by the bed was decorated with tribal signs. Many gave an aborigine Auslandia feel to the place. Each symbol was made of a thick, dark paint that varied in color from reddish-brown to black.

The opposite side was a scenic view I recognized with a start as

Bunny's village. It in the picture, though, was no longer in disrepair. All the buildings were new and appeared lived-in, so to speak. I lingered on it for several moments before looking some more.

The window area was gone. In that the entire wall was gone (kinda), replaced by a painting in the likeness of a shoreline. Definitely a reminder of land. I smirked before looking up.

The ceiling—it was the sky. Like, every sky. It went in a circle around the light fixture from sunrise to sunset, through night and day. It even had spring showers, winter storms, and cloudlessness. It was pretty spectacular, but I wasn't going to admit that to Bunny. Moon knows his ego doesn't need the extra praise!

"Could'ya close the door behind you, mate?"

I did. And was astounded all over again. The entire wall, including the door, was a collage featuring all of the Guardians (and the Moon's eerie glow surrounding them). And this collage had just about everything: their homes, their powers, their symbols, their purposes, their births, their centers, everything. It was like a family portrait.

I followed Bunny's section of Auslandia and the eggs on the far left. Then there was him sitting in the Warren with Groundhog and Wise Old Owl over a massive book, which then blended into Tooth's human life. I stared for a second; it was the first time I had ever seen any likeness of her husband. He seemed like a typical bookworm, like he belonged in a library: tweed suit, glasses, a little bowtie. But I could see the kindness in his smile as he looked down at the bundle in Tooth's arms. It was a shock when I finally realized it was their baby. Her last living memory.

North came next. The Russki village with the snowy fields, pine trees rising up from the flickering flames of houses' windows, a lake that was a frozen mirror of the sky. I remembered North's constant stories about this little isolated place and couldn't help but smile at his fondness of the place.

And then there was Sandy. I stopped for a few lingering moments. I recognized the scene where he was first contacted by MiM from his memories he shared. The weaving sand that glistened through to happy, sleeping faces. It tugged at my heart in the most uncomfortable way. I reached out and let my fingers brush over the careful brushstrokes before turning away. But then I noticed something else which grabbed my attention yet again.

It was on the far end, in the bottom right-hand corner. I kneeled down closer to get a better look. This portion of the mural was only started, but somehow I could tell it was for me. The background was pale blue covered in sketches and outlines, nothing more. From what I could make out, there was a scene of my night against Pitch, and a bunch of hexagons.

"You paint all this?" I asked unnecessarily.

"I did." I heard Bunny get off his bed and walk over (Did I forget to mention he was sitting on his bed?). "It's not done, but it's all I've got so far." I could practically hear him shrug. "What d'ya

think?"

"So farâ€¦" I wasn't sure what else to say. "Why hexagons?"

"Snowflakes are hexagons, right? I thought it was fitting."

"I guess so." I cleared my throat. "Well, thanks."

"Yeah, no problem." He was standing behind me when I got up and turned around. "Reason you came down to my quarters?"

"I'm just bored, I guess."

Bunny nodded understandingly. "Not much to do on this ship, is there?"

"Not really, no."

"Surprised you didn't go off to bug our dragon friend."

I could practically feel the wicked grin oozing onto my face, and by the look on Bunny's face I could tell he seriously regretted what he'd just said.

"Right, I'm gonna stay here. Have fun, kiddo."

I grabbed him by the shoulder with the crook of my staff. "Oh no you don't! You, Eucalyptus my dear friend, have just become my partner in crime for all the mischievous fun we'll cause on this ship!"

"For the love of the moon, I didn't sign up for this," he muttered. "And don't call me that!"

"Call you what?" I asked innocently while leading him towards the ladder.

"You know full well."

"'Dear friend?'"

"Eucalyptus!"

"Aw, why not? It suits you!" I teased. Then I hesitated. "What about the friend part?"

Bunny looked up at me from the bottom of the ladder and grinned while swatting away my staff. "Friend is fine."

I smiled back.

So I found myself on the deck forty minutes later tossing snowballs leisurely at Roxy. She was annoyed at first, but soon was running around the deck with her tongue lolling out of her mouth. Most of the snowballs hit her, but she managed to swallow a good few. Each one she got made her smoke out of her nose, something that amused us both greatly. I even made the deck a large slip-and-slide by freezing it. Her body temperature melted the ice enough to make it a place of great entertainment.

For whatever reason, I swore Phil was keeping a closer eye on me than usual. I wonder why? Bunny was watching us too, but in a less grumpy way. He was sitting on the stairs leading up to the steering wheel working on something that looked like a new boomerang, but it'd been put aside. I could see he was smiling when I glanced over. That was, until I hit him full in the face with a snowball.

"Watch where you aim those things, Frostbite!"

"Oh relax, Cottontail. It'll dry out of your fur soon. Besides, it was just a joke."

He pointed to his scowling face. "Do you see me laughing?"

"You didn't think it was funny?"

"Not in the slightest."

I turned to Roxy. "Did you think that was funny?"

I swore she nodded. Then I asked Baby (who was perched on my shoulder as always) the same question. She shrugged.

"There, you see. Three against one."

"Oh for the love of â€" that doesn't count! Baby was obviously indifferent and no one really knows what Roxy's tryin' to say anyway! She's just a dragon. It's not like they talk or anything."

Roxy looked heartbroken. Phil was just plain mad. I swooped over to the dragon and hugged her around the neck. "Aw look, now you've made hurt her feelings! Apologize immediately."

"No offense mate, but I think you should be the one to apologize first considering you're the one that handicapped her in the first place."

"Roxy forgives me! Right girl?" She snuffed and shook me off violently. "Okay, I'll take that as a maybe."

"Hold it right there! That there was obviously a no."

"Says the one who just claimed no one understands what the dragon's trying to say."

Bunny smirked. "Trust me, everyone can tell when someone hates on Jack Frost. That rejection is something I quite look forward to."

I shrugged. "Keep trying to find people who can say that about me. I don't even exist to most everyone anyway."

"Frostbiteâ€|" He knew he struck a chord.

"Besides," I said, trying to lighten the mood, "you can't keep living the past. You just have to loosen up and keep going. So have fun! Nothing beats having fun. Except for all you stodgy old people constantly working!"

"Moon, you're only like that because you're an untamed boy," he muttered.

"Well, I wasn't kidding about loosening up. Life isn't all business."

"I know that!" he snapped. Then he sighed. "Look, I like the positivity, but it isn't exactly a walk in the park from here on out. Pitch has the upper hand here. And it's close to nightfall. We're gonna hafta stay on our toes if we're to make it here. Who knows when he'll come storming in with his Nightmares and dragons."

"I get that, but it's not like he'll get past my ice!"

"Exactly! That's why we need you to be focused. No more pointless wandering or fooling around."

"Relax, I can handle the heat!"

"But to what extent."

I chose to ignore Bunny's last comment, instead making snowflakes fall gently around me. The Auslandian, however, was persistent. He got up and tapped me on the shoulder.

"Listen Jack. I know it's not something you want to hear, but you ****are**** a winter spirit. Fire can hurt you, even if you're immortal. And not all immortals are perfectly so."

"What's that cryptic bit supposed to mean?" I asked.

Bunny hesitated, but didn't reply. Instead he turned and headed back to whatever it was he was working on. "It's nothing. Just keep your eyes peeled, okay?"

"Fine, sulk all you want! But are you sure I couldn't help you lighten up?" I casually flipped a snowflake around my fingers to make a point.

Bunny's face fell. "Absolutely not."

"You sure? You won't even know it's me!"

His rage was barely masked. "The last time you hit me in the face with one of those bloody happy 'flakes I was giggling like a lovesick schoolgirl over my googies for hours, and ya expect me to take you up on that offer?"

"What? It was a joke!"

"Again, not laughing. See?"

"Whatever. Sorry you have no sense of humor."

"I didn't hear the end of it from Groundhog for weeks on end!"

Now I was laughing.

Just then, North's voice boomed over the entire deck. "EVERYONE! TAKE COVER IMMEDIATELY!"

Bunny hopped over. "What is it? What's going on?"

"Maddie is up in crow's nest. She said she saw something coming from the skies."

That got my interest. I leapt over to the steering wheel with the wind behind me. "Was it Pitch?"

"She said it was black dragon, with a rider."

"Can't be too cautious," Bunny said, drawing his boomerangs. "I'll be in your cabin, North."

"I will join you shortly."

"Wait a second!" I interrupted. "Tooth told me there was a shield around this ship. Why panic? Pitch can't even see us, right?"

North hesitated. I could tell this wasn't something he liked to talk about. "With amount of magic in area, I can only put up shields during night. Pitch would not attack during day."

I turned to look out over the sea. The sun was setting, but it was obviously not nighttime yet. I nodded, though I didn't quite understand this whole magic thing. Did Guardians have some magic meter in their bellies or something?

North noticed my hesitation and patted me on the shoulder. "It is fine for you to be a bit confused. But be wary too. You can stay on deck around masts, hide in sails."

"Why? So I'll be the first line of defense if it is in fact Pitch?"

North laughed jollily. "No no. I feel that you should stay out. I can feel itâ€|"

"â€|in your belly!" I finished, grinning.

"Exactly. Now go. I will be in cabin with Bunny, prepare weapons."

"Got it." I stopped as Baby hit me. "Ow! What?"

She pointed below decks and began to squeak. I got the message immediately. "Tooth! Yeah, we need to warn her!"

Baby took initiative and flew over to the side of the ship. I watched as she tapped on the larger fairy's window/pothole. It opened. A mini conversation happened. Then Tooth stuck her head out and waved up to me.

"I'll be ready downstairs. If anything happens, Baby will keep me posted, okay?"

I gave Tooth a thumbs up and flew to the main mast. From it I followed Bunny's advice and kept my eyes peeled, watching the yetis and Roxy evacuate to the hidden room under the steering wheel. I knew Tooth was downstairs, probably with her ladies and the elves. I think Andy was down there too.

I looked up to the crow's nest, where Maddie was monitoring the skies. She nodded down to me, an obvious 'get ready,' and covered herself with a sheet. I kept closer to the main mast and watched the approaching blob. As it got closer, my grip on my staff became firmer. And then it relaxed as I saw what (or should I say who) was on the dragon. Now I was confused as I watched this sleek dragon glide around the ship, giving me a clear view to confirm exactly who the rider was.

And it made no sense to me.

"A boy?"

The Ship (Hiccup's POV)

Thankfully, the water had washed out most of the stiffness in my hair, though the ends were still a bit burnt, and the wind from flying had dried me off. Toothless circled above the ship; I barely noticed I was the one directing him.

_It's large, _he said finally.

I nodded. "Larger than any ship I've ever seen. It looks more like several cabins that float on water than a ship. Just look at the size of the mast! And the sails! How did they make that much cloth?"

Toothless hummed and landed gently. _Stay close. We don't know what sort of people or things could be here._

"A little protective much, aren't we?" I joked as I slipped off of the saddle.

Hush. I don't smell anything living here. But I sense something, many things, and very much alive. Strangeâ€|

As Toothless pondered this, I took a lap around the deck. It was spacious and practically spotless. There were a few coils of rope and smaller boats tied to the sides of this vessel, but that wasn't what got me.

"This deck is made of planks."

I knelt down and felt it. Yep, many planks. And not like wooden pillars. These were smooth and flat with some sort of glossy finish on them. No wonder the ship was of such a size! No trees grew this large for one Viking boat to be carved out of. I stood and continued my search.

The deck was so spacious I found myself wanting to run and slide across it like a young child. However, I didn't; this was a time to be more serious. I made my way to a small flight of stairs that led up to a giant wheel. It didn't look like the rudder on our ships either.

I didn't touch it. Instead, I turned around to the cabin. Toothless was at my side ready to fire a bolt if something dared attack us from there. I gripped the handle.

"Ready bud?"

He growled.

I threw the door open, only to find the room completely empty. Toothless sniffed the air and beckoned with his head for me to follow.

There's no one here.

"Huh. That's not odd in the least bit," I replied.

He sniggered, but I was too busy taking in my surroundings. There was a large bed, and a large table with were both covered in maps and books. There was a plate of cookies too, but I didn't feel hungry (despite not eating anything).

Toothless immediately got bored of the room and wanted to leave. I, however, shushed him and began to look at the maps. They were covered in strange symbols, like runes but not like them at the same time. I picked one up gingerly. It had lands that I had never seen before: large, strangely shaped islands that all looked like pieces of a broken puzzle.

Hiccup, let's go.

"Not yet. I'm still looking."

Toothless groaned. _Maybe you can't feel it because you're only human, but I feel like we're being watched. It's not a good feeling. There's something here. We should leave._

"Oh hush. You're just trying to make me paranoid so we can go home."

Insufferable human!

"Lazy dragon," I mumbled as he left. Putting the map back, I was about to follow when a book caught my attention. It was beautiful thing. Without thinking I grabbed it with both arms and carried it gingerly out of the room.

Sitting down in front of the large wheel with Toothless watching me, I opened it to the first page. There seemed to be a title, but I couldn't read it. I continued to the next page, only to find it covered in more of those strange symbols.

"I've never seen this sort of writingâ€¦" I murmured to myself. Then I turned to Toothless. "Have you ever encountered this before?"

He gave me a look that obviously said, _'Where in sky's name would I learn how to read human tongue?'_

"Okay, fair enough."

I turned back to the book. It was like nothing I'd ever laid eyes on before. It was beautiful, ornate in gold with a heavy red cover. The pages were much thinner and lighter than parchment and seemed to glow with a golden sheen. I flipped through a few pages out of curiosity. More of the strange runes were printed with pinpoint accuracy with flowery designs lining the pages. Not a single error or blemish could

be found.

I sniffed it. It was sweet. No smoky charcoal smell could be detected. "What in the world is this page written on with? And who made these runes so perfect?"

Who cares?

"Me."

I don't like this paper bundle. Put it back and leave.

"No, I want to take it back and try to figure this out. I bet there's something in the Hall of Records that'll help me translate this."

Augh! You're so stubborn sometimes.

"Hey, that's really rude," I argued. "And where do you think I picked up that skill anyway?"

I don't know, your father?

Okay, I couldn't argue with him there. I sighed and said, "I can still steer with the book, okay? And I promise I'll be back early tomorrow so we can fly. Is that a deal?"

Toothless seemed to consider it before agreeing. _Fine. But if you drop that book into the ocean, it's your fault._

"Well, duh!"

Smiling, I hopped down the stairs after Toothless. He adjusted his wing position and knelt down so it would be easier for me to hop onto the saddle without open arms. And I was about to mount him when the floor under me seemed to freeze for no reason and I went flying backwards with a scream (and it was a *manly* scream!).

I swore the wind began to laugh at my horrible tumble.

"Thor Almighty!" I muttered. Toothless helped me up with his snout; though I accepted the help, it didn't stop my rear-end from being sore. "Thanks bud. Geez, I feel like Jǫkul Frosti is here."

Who?

"Never mind. He's a thing of legend back where we Vikings live."

Right. Toothless walked away. _I'll be over there if you need me. I swear I smell a Gronkle around here!_

"Wait! I thought we were about to leave. Toothless!" But by then Toothless had wandered off. I groaned.

Then the weirdest thing happened. With a small crackle frost began to run along the deck and freeze everything around me. I spun around, but couldn't find a cause for it. My breath came out in wintry pants, clouding around my mouth. I could feel the air temperature

drop greatly, followed by a voice laugh from behind me. I gasped. That was the same laugh from earlier that I thought I had imagined up. I turned, but there was no one there.

"Who's there?" When I got no response, I added (trying to sound braver/cooler than I really was), "If you don't show yourself, I'll make Toothless attack you with a fireball. And I don't think you'd like that very much."

I heard the laughter again, this time from high above me in the sails. I peered up, but saw no one. There was no way this was just my imagination; I created weapons, not people. No, there had to be someone there. Very subtly I reached into my vest and wrapped my fingers around the familiar hilt of my dagger. Maybe I couldn't kill someone with it. But worst-case scenario, just having something to throw could be better than nothing.

The ship became eerily silent. Nothing made a sound except for the wind gently blowing. I backed up a few steps. "Toothless?"

_I'm here. _His voice was comforting. _I sense it too, don't worry._

I nodded, hoping he'd see; Toothless was out of my peripheral and I had no idea where exactly he was. Just then I heard the sound of someone landing on the deck behind me. The voice spoke again, much closer than I'd expected.

"Toothless? As in your dragon. By the moon, that's an interesting thing to call a dragon. And here I thought Henrietta was a bad name!" Then as an afterthought it said, "No offense, of course."

I gasped and whipped around, dagger out. Still, despite going all on the attack I hadn't been expecting what I saw.

It was a boy, a couple of years older and a good head-or-so taller than me. He was pale, paler than any person I had ever seen in my life, with shining silver hair and eyes a brighter blue than the sky. They also had a strange glowing quality to them. As if he wasn't real.

He wore odd garments too: a dark blue long-sleeved shirt with a pocket in the front and a hood in the back, and brown pants that were fraying on the bottom ending above his ankles. In his hand was a long staff with a hook on the end. It looked a lot like something Mildew (the senile old man who lived outside of the village) had, which he used to drag sheep around by their necks. Strangely enough, his feet were bare.

Though something about this person â€" or spirit or whatever he was â€" was oddlyâ€¦I'm not even sure. It's like I knew who he was through a story or something. Something that was definitely impossible.

"Who are you?" I asked in my best brave voice.

I guess the voice worked because the figure blanched and stared, paling more than his already-pale self. His strangely blue eyes stared into mine in disbelief. "Wait, you can see me?"

"What?"

The Northern Sea: Aurora Borealis (Jack's POV)

I couldn't take my eyes off of the boy as he steered his dragon down to the deck. There was something more than just flying between them, even I could sense it and I had no potential for spirit-y magic like the Guardians, namely Bunny.

As he landed and slipped off of the saddle, I saw some strange contraptions attached to the dragon. As I peered more closely, I saw it was a prosthetic fin connected to foot pedals. So this dragon was handicapped. Was this a plot of Pitch for more control?

I stared. No, it couldn't be. This was a human boy, not some mind-controlled thing. Unless that was what Pitch was actually doing this far north: converting innocent kids to do his bidding? Still, I didn't quite believe that theory.

Whoever this boy was, he just looked like an awkward teen wandering around the deck like it was his first time on a ship. Judging by the old-fashioned getup, I decided this was probably true. This far from the border there was probably no such thing as a sky ship, and they're the only ones built in such a massive size. I remembered back when I first saw the Aurora Borealis and I couldn't help but smile. His shock mirrored mine.

The boy kept close to his dragon as he wandered around the ship, looking at just about everything. He seemed to be mumbling on to himself, looking at his dragon occasionally only to make some disgruntled noise and a snippy comment. I couldn't make out what he was saying, but I made me ~~me~~ ^{Amber} curious.

He didn't notice the secret room all the yetis were crowded in, but continued up to the steering wheel. As he turned to it, I had a clear view of his face. Okay, not that clear considering I was many, many feet above him.

He was thin, with a round nose and freckles. His face was contorted into a puzzled way, as though he wasn't sure exactly what he was looking at. I observed as his hand reached out only to pull back quickly as though he knew what he was about to do was wrong.

Then he turned around and went to the door. Hand frozen on the handle, he turned to his dragon (which was crouched at his side in an attack position) and said something to it. They gave each other a long look before he turned the handle and opened the door wide.

I tightened my grip on my staff, knowing North and Bunny would attack him at full force. I waited for their battle cries, to hear something â€" anything â€" only to hear nothing. Nothing at all. I frowned. What the heck was going on?

I floated down to on top of the cabin. The boy was emerging with his dragon, both completely unharmed. When they weren't watching I leaned over so I was hanging upside-down in the doorway with my head poking inside. As I expected, North and Bunny were there. They looked confused, so I waved and left it at that.

I pulled myself back up and crouched on the roof while watching the

boy. He was seated in front of the wheel, baffling over the book. I recognized the book immediately from my supposed initiation that didn't happen. Looks like North was keeping that thing around until I changed my mind (which I haven't yet).

Suddenly, he said, "Me."

I stayed silent. The boy turned back to his dragon, then became more insistent. "No, I want to take it back and try to figure this out. I bet there's something in the Hall of Records that'll help me translate this."

Translate? So he couldn't read the book?

He was still talking, eyes back on the book. "Hey, that's really rude. And where do you think I picked up that skill anyway?" A pause, then, "I can still steer with the book, okay? And I promise I'll be back early tomorrow so we can fly. Is that a deal?"

He got up while laughing. "Well, duh!"

I then realized he'd been talking to it the whole time. Curious.

For whatever reason, I stayed behind him. I don't know why but my gut was telling me I should listen to the others and stay hidden. What? I'm terrible at hiding as it is! Three hundred years of that gets pretty habitual.

As the boy ran down the stairs and towards his dragon, I landed on the deck. Which was still covered in water. Which froze the moment I touched it. And made the boy fall backwards with a shout. And as a chain of events goes, I began to laugh hysterically. What? He flew back onto his rear with the girliest scream I'd ever heard. How would you not be laughing at that?

He looked less amused, swearing loudly or something; I didn't hear him because I had already flown up into the rafters of the mast. Henrietta was staring down at me. I just beamed.

And then the boy said something that made me grow cold.

"Thanks bud. Geez, I feel like Jǫkul Frosti is here."

"Jǫkul Frosti?" I said to myself. "Wait, wasn't that what MiM told me to remember?"

Eyes wide, I looked back down at the boy with much more interest. Where had he heard those words before? I wanted to ask him, but knew it was fruitless. Thankfully, I didn't need to. He answered my question for me.

"Never mind. He's a thing of legend back where we Vikings live."

He. As in a person. A person of legend.

I didn't even care that his dragon had wandered off towards where the yetis and Roxy were hidden. All I could focus on was the sudden power I felt from those two words. Jǫkul Frosti. Something about them made my power thrum through me like liquid ice.

"Wait! I thought we were about to leave. Toothless!"

I couldn't help but laugh at the feeling of power. I floated down so my feet only grazed the deck, frost developing everywhere and temperature dipping until I could see the boy's breath puffing nervously in the air. He turned to where I was, but I had already floated back up to the mast. Trying to control my sudden surge of power, but it wasn't working. What the heck was causing it? Surely it couldn't just be the name.

I felt another nervous laugh bubble out of me.

"Who's there?" It was the boy, looking up at the rafters where I was hidden. He paused for a moment. "If you don't show yourself, I'll make Toothless attack you with a fireball. And I don't think you'd like that very much."

"Toothless?"

The dragon was just out of his view, but I had a bunch of fun messing with them. It's not like they could see me, after all. How wrong I was.

Now I had to laugh. I landed back down behind him and began to chuckle at the strangeness of the name.

"Toothless? As in your dragon. By the moon, that's an interesting thing to call a dragon. And here I thought Henrietta was a bad name!" I heard her warble something angrily down at me, so I added, "No offense, of course."

The boy then gasped and turned around towards me with his dagger brandished. I was prepared to laugh again and make some snarky comment about watching where short people pointed weapons when he said something that make me stop.

"Who are you?"

My earlier thought came back to me. _It's not like they could see me, after all._ How wrong I was.

This awkward boy, with his furry boots and vest, green shirt and even greener eyes, had seen me. And he was asking who I was. Not knowing how to react, all I could say was, "What?"

He gripped both hands around his dagger. "You heard me. Now, I don't know who or what you are, but I want an answer out of you. Who are you, and what have you come to do?"

But I could hardly care about his questions. I was too busy laughing. "Wait, you can hear me?"

He looked confused; I don't blame him. "Ummâ€¦yes?"

"Youâ€¦you can see me?"

He nodded. I began to whoop, flipping in the air, laughing in a somewhat crazed way. The boy just stood there, staring at me. But I didn't care.

"Jack?" I turned around to see North and Bunny approaching me, both armed to the teeth. North had been the one to speak. "What has happened?"

"He sees me!" I was still a little off. "He can see me!"

Both the Guardians looked ready to interrogate me, but then the boy distracted me again. "Now that we've established that I can see and hear you, can you please explain what's going on? Am I missing out on something here?"

I don't know why, but out of a whim I half-tackled him into a bear hug. "You are the first person to see me in three hundred years! The first in all of my existence!"

"What?"

I pulled away, smiling brighter than the sun. "Hi. I'm Jack, Jack Frost."

"Again, what?"

"Your name isâ€¦"

"Hiccup," he replied quickly. "But more importantly, can you please explain what's going on?"

I suppressed a laugh (his name was Hiccup?) and did my best to calm down. "I'm not really sure. I was just wandering around the deck here and suddenly you show up with your dragon. Toothless, right?"

"Yeah, Toothless."

By then Toothless had rejoined his rider at his side, watching me curiously. I waved. "Hey there. Anyway, you suddenly said the name JokÃ°l Frosti and I felt this surge of power. I'm a winter spirit and when you said it, I just felt more winter-y. You know?"

"No, I really don't."

I laughed at that. "Yeah, I guess you wouldn't."

"Soâ€¦are you our winter spirit. JokÃ°l Frosti. The one that brings frost and snow to the area and plays pranks of people during your reign?"

Something about all of that felt right. The tingling in my body only got stronger the more he said those magical words the Man in the Moon had said to me. Suddenly, it all clicked into place. "Yeahâ€¦I guess I am JokÃ°l Frosti. But I go by Jack Frost now. It's easier on the memory of the masses, you know."

I heard Bunny snort behind me. "As if you care about the masses."

I hit him casually with my staff without turning around. He swore a bit, which made me snort.

A moment of silence. I cleared my throat. "So, Hiccup â€" I can call you Hiccup, right? â€" what made you find this fine ship

here?"

"Well, I was out with Toothless," he started, "and I saw this in the distance and came to investigate. Sorry, that seems really rude since it looks like your boat."

"Oh, it's not mine. It belongs to Norâ€" I mean Santa Claus."

He nodded slowly.

I decided to take the chance and ask, "Have you ever heard of Pitch Black."

"Who?"

"You know, the Boogeyman?"

Hiccup shook his head. "Never heard of him in my life. Why?"

I shrugged; so he wasn't in league with Pitch, it seemed. "No reason. Forget about it."

"Okay thenâ€"|"

Neither of us noticed how his dragon had flinched slightly when I brought up Pitch. Meanwhile, Hiccup had pointed down to the ground.

"Is that your book there?"

I turned to where he was pointing. The poor book was lying with its pages open to the frozen ground. I picked it up and blew the dirt off of it, also swiping a bit off the edge of the spine with my hand. I hope North wasn't too mad about him dropping it. "This book?"

He nodded.

"Well, it's not mine. But I know of it," I offered.

The boy nodded some more. "What are those symbols in it? I've never seen them before?"

"What, letters?"

"â€"lettersâ€"|" He seemed to ponder the word for a while.

I cleared my throat. "If you don't have letters, what do you write with anyway? Symbols?"

"Runes. Here, I'll show you." Hiccup fumbled in his furry vest until he pulled out a bundle of parchment bound in leather. I took it and flipped through carefully.

North leaned over my shoulder to look. "That is Norse alphabet! I have not seen this for many years! Only saw it on cave drawings and in history museums in the cities as young child."

Bunny agreed. "The last time I saw any Norse was in Wise Old Owl's library, and even he said the language had died out hundreds of years. The closest thing we've got to it is in Islandska, and even

their people adopted the Common alphabet by the time Tooth was in the field.

"Hang on a secâ€¦" Bunny stared. "This Norseâ€¦it's that old alphabet of runes, all right, but it uses the spellin' of Common. I can read it."

"Wait, this is Norse?" I asked him.

"Yeah," the boy answered. "Norse. You know, the language we're speaking."

I held my hands up. "Whoa whoa whoa, time out! I am not speaking Norse."

"You're not?"

I shook my head. "Nope. And neither are you, it seems. All I hear is Common tongue."

"Common tongue?"

"Yeah, Common. Isn't that right, guys?"

The others nodded to confirm what I was saying.

"Ummâ€¦"

I turned back to Hiccup. "Yeah?"

"Who have you been talking to? Are they hidden?" He was craning his neck to see over my shoulder. "I don't see anyone. Do you, Toothless?"

Again, he turned to the dragon and did some crazy telepathy thing. "Toothless says he doesn't smell any other presences either."

"He didn't notice us when he came into the captain's quarters, mate," Bunny said.

North concurred. "This is true. He walked through us on way out."

"Wait, what? Okay, I'll ask him about that. They're right behind me. You see them earlier?" I wondered out loud. "They were there the whole time, and you walked right through them. How is it that you can see me and not themâ€¦? Do you not believe in Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny?"

"Umm, who?"

Well that was confusing. I shook my head; there was no time to explain everything now. I'd have to sit down with him for at least a few hours.

"Look, Hiccup. We can answer all of each others' questions in the morning, 'kay? How about we meet up here again around, oh I don't know, nine o'clock? Does that work for you?"

"Nine o'clock?" He looked confused. "What's a 'nine o'clock?'"

Now it was my turn to be confused. "You know, nine? As in time. Hours, minutes, seconds, et cetera. Comes between eight and ten."

"I know my numbers," Hiccup huffed indignantly.

I grinned. "Well, that's a relief. Not so primitive then, are you?"

"â€|but I don't know of this 'time' you speak of. In that context. I mean, we have time. Days, weeks, months, years, seasons. That's time. But not those other things."

Hiccup looked pretty flustered as he spoke. My grin was fading as he explained stuff.

"You don't have clocks where you come from?"

"Clocks?"

"Never mind."

I thought for a moment. Now this was a puzzle. Either Hiccup was really good at pretending or he had no idea that he was part of a group of peoples long extinct. Still, if he was really a Viking, then it was possible that they didn't have clocks.

Which just complicated things a lot more.

"Wait right here," I told him before dashing off towards North's cabin. He followed me, knowing exactly what I was planning to do.

"You need clock for Hiccup?"

I nodded. "Preferably something he can easily hide. Like, I dunno, a pocket watch? He's got pockets in that fur vest of his, it looks like."

"I should have one somewhere. Let me find it."

With a little digging in one of his drawers (he had a bunch of wooden filing cabinets filled with random things) North pulled out a pocket watch with a successful cry. It was silver with intricate carvings of mountains on its cover. I took it and flipped it open. The numbers were not Roman numerals; for once I was glad. I prefer the fanciness of the X's and I's.

"He'll be able to read this, right?"

"We must hope so."

The two of us exited and headed back to the deck. Once again, Hiccup was talking to Toothless under his breath. The dragon growled slightly but did nothing but watch me approach. The boy looked up too and I grinned.

"Here, your own personal watch." I handed it to Hiccup. He looked even more confused. "Push that button on the side to open the lid," I suggested.

He did as he was told, slightly shocked as it popped open. I stood next to him and pointed.

"Right, I'll take you through the basics of how to read time. Time is pretty simple once you know it. There are these things, measurements, called seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, and years. I'll start with seconds. Seconds are the smallest unit of time. It takes about as long as it does to say 'one Mississippi,' okay?"

"One missy sippy?"

"Exactly. Now, there are minutes. Sixty seconds in a minute."

"Okay?"

I pointed to the watch. "That long, thin stick-looking thing, that's called a hand. That specific hand moves in exactly one second increments. Follow me?"

Hiccup nodded. "I think so. So sixty seconds to a minute. One second is like saying one missy sippy."

"Exactly! Now, there are sixty minutes in an hour. See those big numbers on the sides? They go one through twelve. That tells the hour, which the shorter hand on the watch points to. The longer hand points to the minutes. Get me so far?"

"Yeah."

"Then there are twenty-four hours in a day. Then you got all the other things! Seven days a week and whatnot. Got all that?"

Hiccup put the watch around his neck and pulled out his notebook and pencil. "Can you repeat all that? I think I'll need to write it down."

I laughed. "No worries. I can explain it better tomorrow. Just come here when that little hand points to the big nine there, okay? I'll talk to the others about how to explain it better."

"You described time very well, Jack," North complimented. I couldn't help but grin a little wider.

"Okay," said Hiccup. "These numbers look a bit strange to me. Which one's the nine?"

"That one."

"Okay, thanks." Hiccup, having finished adjusting his saddle, turned back to me. He asked, "Do you think I'll be able to see the others tomorrow? The people you keep talking to? That is, unless you're some crazy person who imagines these people."

"Says the one who talks to a dragon," I noted.

Hiccup frowned. "I can talk to Toothless, and he replies. But that's not the point. I just want to know who you keep talking to behind you."

I patted the boy on the shoulder, surprised that I actually could. It hadn't quite sunken in that he actually could see and believed in me. "Sure thing. Just promise me you'll come back with an open mind!"

He nodded and hopped onto his dragon. "Tomorrow at this nine o'clock thing, then."

"Tomorrow at nine."

But before he left, Hiccup asked me one last thing.

"About when in the day is nine o'clock?"

"In the morning."

"Right. So I'll see you then."

I mock-saluted him with my staff. "You betcha!"

I watched as Hiccup and Toothless disappeared into the distance. By then, the others who had been hiding below deck came out; no doubt they were all listening in from right under the hatch. As they all came to join us the sun had completely set. As its last rays vanished I could see the moon reflecting off of the calm, flat ocean.

A small whoosh sounded. A film, almost like a bubble made of all the colors of a real aurora, surrounded the ship in a veil of magic.

As I stared at it, thinking of what had just happened, my vision began to blur. _I'd been seen. _I gasped as the reality of the situation hit me and I sank to my knees, my legs unable to hold my weight up for some reason. _I could touch someone. _My staff clattered to the deck out of my hand next to me, rolling away slightly. But I could hardly care. _I could talk to him. _I looked up at nothing, gasping. There was not enough air for me to breathe. _I was believed in._

Nothing in the world could sum up this feeling as hot tears began to run down my flushed face and freeze. The Guardians surrounded me with worry, just as ignorant of the situation as I had been.

"Jack? Mate, what's wrong?"

"Why do you cry?"

"Are you okay? Does something hurt? What is it?"

I laughed a bit, wiping my eyes. "I'm believed in. Somebody saw me, and spoke to me. I could touch them without them walking through me. I don't think you understand what this means to me."

"No, I do not imagine we do," agreed North, "but now it make much more sense why Manny sent us north."

The four of us turned to the shining moon. For once, I didn't feel any bitter resentment to it.

"Yeah," I agreed. "I think I do too. Now all I need is my purpose."

Berk: The Hall of Records (Hiccup's POV)

After leaving the cove, I wandered into the Hall of Records with the full intent of figuring out what this "common" was that Jack had spoken of. What I hadn't expected was Fishlegs to still be there, pouring over an ancient-looking book.

" 'Legs?"

He looked a bit startled as my voice roughly dragged him to reality. But when he laid eyes on me, he smiled genuinely. "Hey Hiccup! I knew you'd be here eventually. I saved you something to eat."

"Thanks. You shouldn't have," I said as I began to dig into the tough meat and hard bread from dinner. "It's just too claustrophobic to eat in there, especially with Dad home."

"You're welcome. And I understand. Hey, most of the attention'll be on him and his plan to try and get us through the winter. I heard that dragon training's going to be cancelled for at least six or seven days."

"Really?" I couldn't've been more relieved.

Fish, however, mistook my tone for the opposite. "Yeah, sucks, doesn't it? I mean, especially since you can finally prove yourself to your dad."

I made an indignant sound through my food. He heard it and laughed.

"Okay, fine. I get that you're trying to get your own name up from 'Useless,' but you've gotta admit the extra attention doesn't hurt."

I swallowed my bite and washed it down with some weak mead. "I guess."

Fishlegs looked ready to continue his current conversation so I quickly distracted him by asking, "What have you got there? I don't think I've seen this book before."

His eyes lit up and he began to tell me about rediscovering an original copy of ceremonial practices in Berk. It was interesting, but my mind wandered away from Loki's daughter to the day's events. The flight and the soul bond. How I was able to communicate with Toothless effortlessly now. And then the ship. Meeting Jokl Frosti. Or I guess his name's Jack Frost now. His mission to bring winter.

But there was more that seemed to nag at me like a stodgy housewife. How he was adamant that I see him again; something about being the first person to see him in three hundred years. It was strange and didn't make any sense. It was frustrating. It didn't seem right.

And now the more I thought of him, the more I couldn't get him out of my mind.

I turned back to Fishlegs. Thankfully he hadn't noticed my lack of

reaction, still chatting away with his whole heart. Suddenly it struck me that I was probably his only true friend. The only friend that truly knew and accepted this side of him. And he was the only one who I could talk to about anything (except maybe Toothless).

It hurt.

"I mean, it's still really cool that the first people here used to worship Hel as well. I guess they were afraid of getting on Loki's bad side or something, Hel being his daughter and all, but still!"

"Hey, Fishlegs?" I interrupted, unable to take it anymore.

He looked at me, arms that had just been moving animatedly dropping to his sides. "Yeah?"

My question came out before I could stop myself. All self control was gone.

"Do you believe in Jokull Frosti?"

I cringed at the mere thought of asking such a weird thing. Fishlegs, being a good guy, didn't really question my question. He thought about it for a few moments and replied honestly.

"Not really. At least, not anymore. I used to when I was little though. My mom would always tell me stories about him whenever we got snowed in, but that was years ago. I grew out of it. It's just a childhood story after all. Why?"

I shrugged, absentmindedly twirling the bone from my bird leg around my fingers. "No reason. I guess it's just the late winter that's bugging me. Maybe if we could have something to blame, like when we were children I guess that's all I've been thinking about. The good old days before all this dragon killing picked up another notch."

He hummed understandingly. "There's an old housewives' saying that I once heard. The first time winter's late, there's famine. The second, plague. And the third, war."

"Well that's morbid," I said, causing Fishlegs to laugh.

"It is, isn't it? Still, I used to believe in it. Kinda like I used to believe in Jokull Frosti, you know?"

"Right." I found myself fingering the pocket watch in my pocket. I'd moved it there to avoid the questions of what I'd managed to create this time (though I doubted anyone would've been truly interested anyway). "Me too."

Then out of curiosity I asked, "What number would we be on now, if that old housewives' saying is true."

Legs thought. "Let's see|last time was back in my grandmother's day. There was a great plague that cut down half of our numbers. So we're on war."

"War?" I thought. "Wasn't the last war against Big-Boobied Bertha's tribe some years before she and our parents were born?"

"Yep! But it ended in peace and the strongest alliance any Vikings in the history of Vikings have ever had. But that was over a hundred years ago."

I was barely listening. Now I was lost in thought. The last time there was war, there in the end was peace. Would that happen this time? Would there be a war?

"But against who?" I wondered aloud.

Fishlegs suggested, "Maybe the dragons? Perhaps we'll finally find the nest and destroy them all once and for all!"

An image of a slaughtered Toothless crossed my mind; I did my best not to cringe obviously. "Yeah, maybe."

'Or maybe we'll be able to find peace with them,' I thought. 'But how?'

* * *

><p>Thanks for reading. And a big thanks for all the reviews I got; my inbox was flooded when I checked, which was a great feeling. Thank you so very, very much!

Now Hiccup learns about time. I got a review asking if it would be explained why the Vikings are stuck in the Dark Ages while the Guardians and anything south of the border seems pretty modern. This will be explained to all those wondering in the distant-ish future. I'm sorry my answer can't be clearer; but it will be explained, I promise.

_On a completely unrelated note, Japan was (as expected) amazing! I won't gush about my vacation here, so PM me if you would like to hear more about my trip. I'll answer any and all questions to the best of my ability. If anyone's interested in looking at some pictures I took in Japan, I'll have a link to my Flickr account on my profile by the __**next**__ chapter; too many pictures, too little time to get them all organized, ya know?_

Love you peoples; I'll get on this next part ASAP.

-Sushi

13. Be Strong, Believe

Hi again!

You people won't believe how relieved I am to have finished this chapter! My poor computer was put through substantial stress with the sudden heat in my area (poor insulation and no AC upstairs = 110+ degrees) and went belly-up for about a week. But it's cooled down and the computer's decided to start working again so I'm back on schedule.

_But we have hit a milestone: over 100 followers! Hooray! To celebrate this, I ask: is there anyone out there who wants to make a cover art for me? Not much celebration, I know. How about free

hypothetical cookies and an air hug? I offer you all both. ;D_

* * *

><p>13 " Be Strong, Believe

* * *

><p>North of Berk: The Volcano

Pitch Black and the Queen both turned their attentions from their engagements as the tiny green dragon fluttered tiredly into the volcano and perched upon the speaker's stone.

The Queen was the first to speak. _**Terror, you have returned.**_

_Indeed, your majesty. _The tiny dragon folded its wings and bowed. _I bring news of the boy and the beast._

_**Speak, **_she commanded.

_I'm afraid it's not good. I found the Night Fury and it seems as though it has completed the soul bond with the human fledgling. However, _he said quickly before the queen could interrupt, _this isn't a strong bond. I don't see them being able to do more than speak to one another._

_**I see. This is disappointing news indeed. **_She sighed. _**You may go.**_

_That wasn't all, your majesty. _After he was given permission to continue, the Terror said, _As I was leaving, the boy had noticed a ship in the distance. I flew near it, but I dared not too close in fear of Vikings._

**I understand. Is that all?**

Just one last detail, you majesty. This ship, it was larger than any ship I had ever seen. If I were to make an assumption, this ship is not of Viking make. It must be from the lands south of where our enemies reside. From the places the Dark One speaks of.

_**Thank you, Terror. Now leave. **_He bowed once more and flew out. The Queen's attention turned to Pitch Black, who was sitting on a stone throne he'd crafted for himself in the far shadows of one of the walls. _**This is interesting information. What do you make of this, Boogeyman?**_

Pitch looked up from where he was sitting. "Well, this is troubling news indeed. It seems as though we should believe your little dragon. And if he tells the truth, then this situation becomes quite complicated. That ship must be the Guardians."

**They made it past the borders? I thought it would be impossible.**

"As did I. But I think there is an explanation." When she didn't interrupt Pitch continued. "Jack Frost. He must've been immune to the effects of the border because he isn't a Guardian."

**So he has yet to take their sacred oath.**

"So it seems. Meaning that Jack has yet to find a reason to live, let alone _be_ a Guardian. This means he still lacks a center. This makes him malleable, manipulatable if you will."

**So there is hope yet to recruit him?**

Pitch shook his head. "I think he has been too strongly influenced by the enemy to become our ally."

**Then what shall we do?**

"We will wait until we're given a chance to split him away from them. If we can get Jack alone without any allies, then he is a much easier target. And once he's out of the picture, the Guardians have lost their strongest defense here."

Pitch waited for the Queen to reply. Then slowly, slowly, he felt an evil approval. _**Very well. We will wait for a moment to strike with Jack Frost. I take it you will be responsible of the winter spirit?**_

"Only if you grant me the permission," he said in a sickly sweet voice.

**And the Viking child?**

"I'll get onto that immediately, my queen."

As Pitch left the volcano, he could feel a smile slipping onto his thin lips. Everything was working out much more to his favor than he'd expected. He couldn't help but chuckle a bit; how long it had been since Pitch felt such power. He was thoroughly enjoying it.

Berk: The Forge (Hiccup's POV)

In the end I didn't find anything about Common tongue. I excused myself early, thanking Fish once again for grabbing me dinner, and went to brood alone in my workshop. It was empty and small and my own. I didn't want to face the world, not my just-home Dad or talkative Fishlegs or angry-at-me-for-no-reason Astrid.

I sat down in my chair heavily and sighed. Why did life have to be so complicated? It's not like I had enough on my plate before some strange ship shows up off the shore of Berk only to be housing a winter spirit who kept babbling on about other spirits I'd never heard of in my life.

So I did the one therapeutic thing that had never failed me in my life: I pulled out my notebook and I began to draw. Anything and everything that came to mind made it into my pages. Toothless, his fin, and every odd and impossible design that was imaginable. Then came people I knew: Dad, Astrid, Fish, Snot, the twins, anyone in the village. Twenty pages flew by, my pencil broke after it became nothing more than a stub, and candle wax was slowly running out of the dish.

And then my hand hesitated as it finished drawing the likeness of Jack.

I stopped, staring at it. Everything about him had me asking questions that I couldn't answer. Who was he? Who were the people he spoke of, those being I couldn't see? Why was he here? But the thing that occupied my mind was what he had on the ship. All those strange things I'd never seen before. Including his giftâ€|

I put down my charcoal and pulled the pocket watch out of my vest. The silver glinted off of the candlelight with a reddish-blue streak. I'd only ever seen silver one other time in my life. It was from the last time trader Johan had made his way back up to Berk. There had been one amulet near his usual pot of squid ink that gleamed in the same way. When I'd asked about it, the man simply said, "A bit of a price there, Master Hiccup. This here is real silver, forged in the likeness of Thor's hammer for safety out at sea. It was something I promised to keep for your father."

And that he did. Now it was displayed proudly on Stoick's broad chest.

I held the clock up, then held it close to my ear and listened to it. I could hear it make a small tick sound with each second, like gears. I longed to open it and find out how it worked, but the only nail was barely the size of a needle. So that wasn't an option.

Sighing, I flipped through my notebook to where I had written down what I could remember of what he'd told me. Other spirits who he was surprised I didn't believe in. Something about a person named Pitch Black.

None of it made sense.

I swung the chain so the watch jumped into my hand, flicking it open with the press of a button. The thin hand continued its mechanical movements. I observed closely. It was on the nine now. Was it already nine o'clock? Noâ€|he said in the morningâ€|

I pocketed the thing. It felt like another weight, a secret, which I had to carry.

I yawned. Whatever it was, flying and meeting Jack and having so many sleepless nights was wearing me down. I decided to bed in my workshop for the night; no reason to disturb my dad. Knowing him he was probably in some important chief-related meetings until sunup, but I didn't take my chances. I didn't think I was ready to look him in the eyes quite yet.

Pulling out some animal furs, I curled up on the floor and tried desperately to fall asleep. I tossed. And turned. And tossed and turned some more. Yet no matter what I did my mind was still racing from everything that'd happened.

And I was feeling more and more drawn to Toothless.

Finally unable to take it anymore, I sat up. Though the decision seemed rash and a bit stupid, I decided to go to the cove for the night. There was no way I could sleep in the village.

Taking only myself, a notebook, a pencil, and the watch (as well as some bread with cheese and water for breakfast, and a basket of fish for Toothless) I snuck as quickly as possible out of the village and into the woods. I passed a wildberry bush and picked some on my way; they were probably the last of the season so I figured I should enjoy them before winter.

It was funny to think that just a month ago I wouldn't have had the courage to be out in the woods at night. In fear of both running into a bloodthirsty dragon and falling off a cliff. Now the path was all but clear despite the lack of light. I didn't think moonlight was enough for me to navigate. Perhaps I was getting used to the surroundings.

It didn't take long for me to find and navigate my way into the cove. Hopefully Toothless was still awake.

Berk: The Cove (Toothless's POV)

I hadn't been expecting anyone to come by that night. Usually nighttime was my time where I could think alone. And I had quite a lot of thinking to do.

For starters, there was the soul bond. It was as strange and foreign to me as human customs. For once I had no knowledge of my own, no place to go for guidance. And no one who would understand that. No one, that was, except Hiccup. And even he didn't actually know what was happening either.

Then there was the boy on the ship. I hadn't noticed him until after Hiccup said something. And this was obviously someone he believed in; I'd never heard of this Jack character in my life. Perhaps that was an effect of the soul bond as well.

And then there was the mention of the Dark One by the boy. Just hearing his true name, his title, made me angry. Hiccup was too distracted to notice, but it still wasn't comforting. He was the one behind my rider's dreams. There wasn't a doubt in my mind. And if it was true that this new boy was trying to find the Dark One—I would have to tell Hiccup about him sooner or later.

But I didn't want to worry him. For all I knew, the Dark One could be back again, and soon. If he saw our soul bond was completed, I was afraid what he would do to Hiccup. The boy is only human, after all. Yet if the attacks on his subconscious would continue—

I sighed. It was about time to tell him the truth. Or at least part of it. If the Dark One were to target Hiccup again, he only deserved to know what was happening. It wasn't fair to keep such important information from him.

Yet if I told Hiccup he would feel obligated to go to the Nest. I couldn't take him there in fear of both our safety. If the Dark One or the Queen were to learn I gave away their location to a human I had soul bonded with—

I shuddered. Perhaps it would be better to wait after all.

The more I thought of Hiccup, the more I worried for him, and the more I felt the need to be near him and protect him from anything bad

that could happen. Something bad could happen without me knowing and what kind of dragon would I be to not protect someone so important to me? Because " as I've grown to see and accept " the little human was important to me. He gave me back my flight and he introduced me to a world where mankind wasn't completely bad.

But most of all, he became my only friend. My only friend since the beginning of my lonely existence.

And I wasn't ready to lose that one true friend.

Just then, I heard a branch snap. I shot up. My body went into instant attack mode, crouched with a growl. _Who's there? Show yourself!_

"Relax. It's just me."

Hiccup?

From behind the boulder the lanky boy emerged, a lopsided smile on his face and a bundle of something I couldn't see in his arms. He waved to me with one hand. I cocked my head to one side and sat back.

"Hey bud," he greeted awkwardly.

I walked over to him, sniffing the bundle in his arms. They smelled like the village and him. The smaller fibers of the soft thing tickled my nose and I sneezed. _What is that?_

Hiccup spread it out onto the ground.

I recognized the object. _An animal pelt? What in sky's name do you use that for?_

"Sleeping on. Unlike dragons, we can't exactly make a warm place to rest every night, so this is the best we humans can do. You know, like clothes."

I nodded and left it at that. _I presume you want to spend the night here._

He grinned sheepishly. "Yeah. I couldn't sleep back in the village. And"well, this might sound a bit weird but"I felt kinda " I dunno " _drawn_ to you."

That must be part of the soul bond! I exclaimed. _I didn't think you'd feel it too!_

"Soul bond?" Hiccup asked. "What is that, exactly?"

It's"hard to explain.

"Well, I'm all ears."

Hiccup crawled down onto his fur, lying on his stomach, and looked at me expectantly. Knowing there was no way out of this I made myself comfortable and began.

_Soul bonds occur between two beings of different species. The most

common one is that between a dragon and a human. No one knows why or how any of this works out, but the bottom line is that these two become one._

" 'Become one?' "

We share a mind, a body, and a soul. Or that's what the legends say at least. And it seems they were partially correct. From what I've gathered we do share mind and soul. I can see the connection.

Hiccup seemed interested by that. "You can _see_ our connection?"

It happens. Dragon vision can make out what humans cannot. I see your colors and textures, but I can also seeâ€|forces, if you will. And another, energies we dragons call the spirit world. They're made up of unearthly powers that cannot be seen through normal vision, but one can associate color with them. It's complicated.

"Sounds like it."

I smiled. _Anyway, forces are what we can feel. It's because of them that we know when to fly or what the weather is like. This also lets us communicate with one another. Then there are energies. When we allow our vision to, we can see connections between those, including mates or siblings or, in this case, soul bonds. The connection is deeper than just a mere kinship because it allows interspecies communication and emotional exchange._

"So you can feel my emotions?"

Sometimes.

"Wowâ€|" Hiccup watched me closely. "Can you tell me what the soul bond looks like?"

It looks like, what's the wordâ€|a broid? No, a braid! Yes, that's it, a braid. It's a braid of gold connecting between our hearts. Based on how far away we are, it becomes taunt and thin or very thick. Like now, for example, it's about the width of your arm. But when you're in the village it's about the size of you smallest finger.

His eyes became wide and round as he stared at hisâ€|pinkie, I think. "That's amazing."

I shrugged.

"So what else do you know about this bond?"

Not much else, actually. Everything I know I learned by ear. I heard stories of soul bonds from elder dragons who have long since passed.

"Do you think...do you think ours is a strong bond?"

_Some spoke of souls becoming powerful enough that the two connected beings can speak telepathically from great distances or learn to communicate with each other's species. There are even rumors of

switching between or sharing bodies. Whether I believe them or not, though, is another story._

"So it could strengthen?"

If the stories are true, yes. Possibly.

Hiccup grinned. "It would be cool to be able to do some of those things though, wouldn't it? With the stories you've heard."

_I guess. _Personally I was fine with the current setup. _I'm not exactly an expert on thisâ€|_

"I doubt anyone is considering every Viking in area is determined to kill every dragon that ever comes by."

True. That does become problematic when trying to learn the odds and ends of this puzzle.

I heard him snort with laughter. "Well, we've just got our own problems then!"

Yes, quite a unique array of problems at that.

"But," said Hiccup, "I don't understand how I managed to perform â€" is that the right word? â€" a soul bond with you. I mean, we somehow made one but I don't even understand how."

You offered me your soul the day you gave me the fish, remember?

"I did?"

Yes. And that shocked me too. Most creatures don't do something like that on the first encounter without exchanging some form of ceremonial exchangeâ€|or so I've heard.

"I'm still really confused."

_After I gave you half of my fish. When you reached out to touch me. _I explained. _That was basically giving me your soul._

Hiccup frowned. "That easily?"

I nodded. _I doubt most humans do it so easily. But with you, it was as though you carried your soul in the palm of your hand. I believe this is so because of your sudden trust to me. I don't know about humans, but among dragons we rarely show our true personalities towards one another unless becoming close to the other._

"Humans have the same thing," he said quickly.

Then you understand what I mean. The point is is that you didn't have such inhibitions around me. You were immediately trusting and that trust is what exposed you true feelings. So that hand was more than just a hand at that moment; it was your entirety.

"I didn't, huh." Hiccup rolled onto his back and looked up at the stars. "Geez, I'm just good at screwing up simple things and doing everything complicated, aren't I?"

Meaningâ€|?

"Well, I can't kill anything except a fish or a bug for that matter, I can't get the respect of anyone in my village without cheating, I can't lift a single weapon except for a dagger, I can barely pass as a man considering I do all the things a housewife would do like cooking or laundry, I'm pathetic even for human standards, I only have one other human I'd consider a friend, et cetera et cetera." He was counting off fingers as he spoke.

"And what complicated things do I do correctly? I shoot down and disable a Night Fury, I can't kill said Night Fury, I let said Night Fury free, I become the first Viking to ever observe said Night Fury without being killed, I feed, befriend, and make a new fin for said Night Fury-"

_And, _I cut in, _you became the first Viking to ever flyâ€| on said Night Fury._

Hiccup and I shared a laugh before his face became more solemn. "Toothless, what was my life like without you? It's only been a couple of weeks, but it feels like a lifetime. Like I've become someone else, you know? Lived in their skin and walked in their shoes, because this cannot be something someone like me would do."

_Like us, _I corrected.

He nodded. "Yeah, like us."

We laid there in silence, collecting our own thoughts. Hiccup was tracing patterns in the stars with his hands. _Constellations_, he told me the word was for these pictures. I couldn't see them, but he would say the stars were a map to other worlds. The relaxing atmosphere made me more sure of myself.

I would tell Hiccup the truth.

_I have been doing a lot of thinking, _I said finally.

Hiccup rolled onto his side so he was facing me. "So have I, bud. So have I. But you first. You've had to listen to me ramble since the day we met."

Technically, it was since the third day.

"Technicalities," he said, grinning goofily. I couldn't help but return the smile.

You really aren't like any other Viking I've ever met.

"Probably because I'm the _only_ Viking you've ever met."

_Probably. _I hesitated. _Well, I've been thinkingâ€|about this setup. Us. Your double identity. I understand that you're okay with this, for now, but I'm concerned for you. Even if you can't sense it, I can feel your every emotion when we're nearby. You have so much inner turmoil from the secrets you've had to keep from your village._

Hiccup snorted. "What do you suppose I should do then? Run away from home?"

No! Far from it! You need to stay with your people or else they'll come looking for you. And if they find meâ€|wellâ€|

We didn't need to finish that thought.

I thinkâ€|I think it'd help if you did ramble to me again. Like before. Except this time I can give you my input.

"Because of the soul bond."

Exactly.

"I'll tell you about it bud," he murmured, eyes shutting, "but not now. Not tonight at least. I haven't been getting enough sleep lately and I need to catch up on that if I want to get up and see Jack tomorrow."

What was your first impression of this Jack character?

"I'm not sureâ€|" he said warily. "We'll just have to see budâ€|"

We remained silent for several long moments. Finally, I turned to Hiccup. _Hiccup. There's something important I've been keeping from you that I have to tell you about._

I waited for a response, but none came. _Hiccup?_

A soft snore was my only reply. So he wasn't exaggerating about being so tired.

I was about to wake him up, but seeing his sleeping face without the weight of the real world on his features was good. It was something I needed to see. That despite all the pressure of his life and our life Hiccup was still okay.

Deciding to tell him my secrets another day, I curled up into a tighter ball and was about to fall asleep as well when I felt the need to protect him rise again. It was a strange feeling that I couldn't understand, but didn't do anything to stop.

Hiccup sneezed and shivered slightly. So he was cold. I understood humans didn't have inner fire like dragons; that made the animal furs seem much more logical. But Hiccup was sleeping on top of his instead of wrapping it around him. Wouldn't he freeze?

Taking initiative, I scooted closer to Hiccup and wrapped my wings around him, careful that I wouldn't crush or suffocate him. He snuggled in closer but didn't wake up. Satisfied that he wouldn't be cold I too let my eyes shut and allowed myself to fall asleep.

Berk: The Cove (Hiccup's POV)

I woke up to warmth. It was comfortable and I didn't want to wake up until I realized this warmth was very foreign to me. The realization made me open my eyes.

It was like looking through a thin, dark sheet. I could see the sunlight, but it was grey. I wiggled to turn over only to find blackness. I reached out to touch it (admittedly, I was a bit worried it could be another nightmare) and found that it was scaly. This was familiar.

"Toothless?" I asked.

The blackness moved and I heard him growl sluggishly. Sunlight blinded me momentarily as he opened his wings. I sat up and looked down at him.

"Morning!"

_G'mornin' Hiccup, _he said. I could hear he was still tired.

"You didn't have to keep me warm, you know. I had my fur."

Ya sneezed. Didn't want you dying. Humans die too easily.

"Oh gee, thanks."

Shuddup, I'm sleepy.

So he wasn't a morning person. I grinned and went to get a drink from the pitcher I brought only to find it empty and on its side. Shrugging I went to the edge of the water and had a sip. It was cool and clean. Then it was breakfast. Both the bread and cheese were crushed " I'd accidentally slept on top of them " but they were edible. I sat and chewed.

Toothless woke up some time later, but was walking unsteadily.

"You okay bud?"

_Exhausted, _he moaned. _I didn't think that little flight would do so much to me._

"Well you haven't flown for a long while."

_Don't remind me. _He went and began to eat the fish. I shrugged and pulled out the watch.

"Eight fiftyseven. Oh wait, eight."

Didn't you have to meet Jack at nine?

I did, didn't I? Nodding, I grabbed the saddle and riding vest from their hiding spot behind a large tree root. "Come on bud, let's get out there."

He let me put everything on and took off without finishing his fish. I felt a bit bad about it, but when I asked Toothless said he was fine.

I starved before this, didn't I? I can manage half a breakfast.

"If you say so. Just don't complain later if you end up being

hungry."

He slapped me with a feeler, but lightly. _Quit nagging. You remind me of a mother dragon, constantly fussing._

"Okay, now you're asking to be called huffy."

And you're as unbearable as ever.

We both laughed as we gained altitude. "It'll take a bit to get there."

I know. Just make sure you direct me correctly.

But we both knew that somehow I would.

Aurora Borealis (Jack's POV)

I was up on deck with Tooth and Roxy. Tooth had a clock in her hand; I had just finished feeding Roxy. Apparently Phil figured out she had a liking for fish and rocks. It seems I named her well.

"What time is it, Tooth?" I asked.

"Ten after. You asked me forty seconds ago."

"Did I really?"

She fluttered over to me and rested a hand on my shoulder. "Jack, calm down. I'm positive he'll be here eventually. He's just running a little late. I mean, you taught him how to read a clock yesterday. Maybe he doesn't know just how long flying will take."

"Maybeâ€¦!"

"Quit being so gloomy," she laughed. "You're fine! Look, I think I see something coming over there."

I'll admit I ran to the edge of the ship and smiled. It was Hiccup.

"Told you so," Tooth said.

"I guess so." I turned to her. "Tooth, you know that Hiccup won't be able to see you, right?"

"I do. Like I've said, I've had my ladies go to Berk before, and none of them report any reason of belief in the Guardians. Their holidays and customs are different. They don't even expect money for their teeth, and they wouldn't know what our money was."

"Makes sense."

Hiccup landed and jumped off of Toothless. I went over.

"Good morning."

"Sorry I'm late."

"No problem. Didn't even notice."

"Liar," Tooth whispered before perching on the stairs.

Knowing she was going to give me some space, my full attention turned back to Hiccup, who was staring at Roxy.

"Didn't think you'd have a Gronkle here," he said.

"Is that what she's called? A Gronkle?"

"It's a species of dragon. Boulder class. Shot limit of six. Known to eat rocks and heat them up in their stomachs and shoot them for maximum damage."

I nodded without digesting a word of it. "Phil's decided to call her Roxy or something. I wouldn't know. I don't speak yeti."

"Yeti?"

I laughed. "Never mind. I think we've been confusing each other long enough. Let's start with simpler things. Like introducing each other in the full and asking questions."

Hiccup looked, surprisingly, nervous. "Umâ€¦"

"Here," I suggested, "I'll go first."

He gestured for me to continue.

"Okay, my name is Jack Frost. Or I guess you know me as JokÃ°l Frosti, but details aren't that important. The only reason I know my name is because the Moon told me."

"By moon do you mean MÃ¡ni?"

I was, admittedly, slightly taken aback. "Yeah, Manny. You guys believe in him too?"

Hiccup nodded eagerly. "Yes. He's brother of SÃ³l and son of Mundifari. He who controls the moon cycles and tides. He and his sister run in circles to help man keep track of the days. It's said that Mundifari, their father, had two beautiful children, so beautiful that he decided to call them 'sun' and 'moon.' This arrogance angered the gods and they placed the children in heaven as Mundifari's punishment to fulfill his vision of their beauty."

"I'm sorry."

"Whatever for?" Hiccup asked, confused.

I grinned. "Your mythology sounds waaaaaaaaaaaaay depressing."

"Gee, thanks."

The sarcasm only made me grin wider. "Relax, it's not that bad. Anyway, I'm not sure if that's the same Manny we're thinking of, but I could try to ask him sometime. He's not much of a speaker though."

Hiccup nodded. "Can I hear the rest of your story?"

"Right!" I was smiling, but the more I thought about it, the less happy I became. "I was born â€" well, reborn â€" at the bottom of a lake. And there was so much darkness. Darknessâ€"well, that's the first thing I remember. It was dark, it was cold, and I was scared. But thenâ€"then I saw the Moon. It was so big and it was so bright. It seemed to chase the darkness away. And when it didâ€"I wasn't scared anymore.

"Why I was there and what I was meant to do, that I've never known. I still don't really now, and a part of me wonders if I ever will." I shrugged. "That's all there is to me."

"But what about your family?" asked Hiccup. "Or friends. Surely you have somebody."

"That's the thing. I don't remember."

"Nothing at all?"

"Nothing. I have no memories from my life before I became Jack Frost. I looked like this three hundred years ago, and that hasn't changed at all. So I was reborn. All immortals created by the Man in the Moon apparently are."

"So these invisible people are your family?"

I laughed. "More or less. But this has been a recent development."

"I see."

"Don't be concerned about my lack of family. I'm pretty content with being Jack Frost. I don't regret anything about it. Besides, I've been having fun. Making winter come all around the world is hard work sometimes, but the rewards are awesome!" I smiled. "Making kids laugh can be enough on good days."

"On good days," Hiccup noted.

I sighed. "On bad days, I can only ask myself what my purpose is. No one down south believes in me. You're the first person who's ever seen me in all my years."

"You did mention something like that when you began hugging me yesterday for apparently no reason. After the hugging, or course."

His sarcasm had both of us laughing.

After regaining my composure, I said, "So, Hiccup, return the favor. Tell me a bit about yourself."

"Like what?" he asked.

I shrugged as I paced along the railing of the ship. "I dunno, anything and everything. Who are you? How'd you meet your dragon? What's life in Berk like? Who're your parents and friends? You know, stuff like that."

Hiccup sighed. "Well, I'm not that interesting. Most everyone calls me Hiccup the Useless, but my full name's Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III. Don't laugh," he cut in after seeing my smirk. "It's part of our culture to have hideous names."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. They think it'll scare off gnomes and trolls. Besides, it's not the worst nameâ€¦sometimesâ€¦"

My eyes asked the question that caused Hiccup to blurt out, "Hiccup is a name given to something weak. The runt of the litter. I was named that because my dad lost a bet."

"Care to explain?"

"Well, my mom and my aunt got pregnant right around the same time. So my dad and my uncle Spitelout made a bet: whoever's child was born first, the other would have the right to name him or her. Because my uncle's a bit of an idiot, he couldn't tell that his child was further along than my dad's, so my dad thought he would win for sure."

"But let me guess," I cut in. "He didn't."

Hiccup shook his head. "I was born prematurely, by a lot. The Elder â€" her name's Gothi; she's our healer and the woman of prophecies â€" anyway, she said I wasn't expected until mid-summer. But I came in early spring. It was a messy delivery, but we all made it out alive. The Elder told my parents my mom would never be able to have another child. So it was just me. And I wasn't anything impressive. Small, weak, barely able to breathe or cry. Everyone was sure I would die."

"But you didn't."

"But I didn't." Hiccup nodded. "Even my uncle was impressed. However, he won the bet. And because no one thought I would be able to live he decided to call me 'a hiccup.' Normally in our culture hiccups like me were cast away on a boat into the ocean to have our fate decided by Thor. My parents, though, broke tradition by keeping me, knowing I would be their only child."

"And because everyone thought I'd die, they let it be. But I lived. Sickly and useless, but alive. And because I did live, my name became Hiccup. So I'm stuck with being called the mistake. It wouldn't be too bad if I could prove everyone wrong, but that's not the case."

"I have no friends. I'm still skinny and weak, and no matter what I do I just seem to mess up. I go fishing and end up looking for trolls, falling into a cave under some mountain and breaking my ankle. I want to help, so my dad shoves me into weapon building so I definitely won't be outside hurting myself. And I still hurt myself there! I try to bulk up in the forges and I just dislocate both my shoulders once. And then the one time I step outside during a dragon raid, I manage to burn down three buildings and destroy a ship! I mean, I can't do anything right!"

Dragon raids? I began to wave his staff furiously. "Stop right

there! Dragon raids?"

"Yeah, dragon raids," he repeated. "What about them?"

I looked down at Hiccup with steady eyes. "Tell me everything you can about them. And I mean everything."

"Umâ€¦okay thenâ€¦"

The Ship (Hiccup's POV)

I told Jack everything I knew. It ranged from when they first started hunting in mass to when they began to take the children. The more I said, the more he lookedâ€¦a mix of things. Angry, confused, ready-to-attack.

"I bet this has something to do with him and that being of ash and fireâ€¦"

Whatever he said was confusing. "Um?"

Jack looked back at me. "I'm sorry, what?"

"Do you not have raids where you come from?"

Jack snorted unamusedly. "Where I come from, there aren't even dragons. They're a thing of legend. Heck, I even thought they were all extinct until Pitch decided toâ€¦wellâ€¦"

He fell into a brooding silence. I was curious as to exactly what this Pitch person did, but I didn't pry. Whatever it was it seemed to eat away at Jack whenever he mentioned it. Instead, I cleared my throat and continued.

"Well, the last raid was the reason I have Toothless now."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, I sorta shot him out of the sky. It was because of that that he's lost a tailfin. Honestly, I still feel pretty bad about it, but he insists it's not that bad. Always saying 'it's not like I can't fly again. We can fly now.'"

Because it isn't!

"The sky's important to him, is it?"

"Mmmâ€¦" I stared absentmindedly out over the sea. "There really isn't anything like flying, is there?"

"You can say that again!" he laughed.

I was a bit confused. "You can fly?"

"Yep! Learned how to the day I was reborn! Want me to show you?"

"Sure."

And he took off. Just like that. Flew straight up into the air nearly as fast as Toothless and took several laps around the ship before landing in front of me. The cold wind that followed him roared in my ears and blew all of my hair into my eyes. I brushed it aside and stared at Jack.

He bowed with flourish. "Tada!"

Toothless and I exchanged a look before turning back to Jack in shock. He laughed at our expressions. Okay then.

Jack turned towards me and Toothless. "So you talk to your dragon, right? I noticed you were yesterday."

I nodded. "Yeah, we do. This happened because of some complicated thing called a soul bond that we have. To me, it means we can talk and understand one another better than anyone else."

I think it means a bit more than that.

"Oh hush!"

Why? You're the only one who can hear me.

"Because it makes me look crazy if I'm speaking to someone only I can hear."

Toothless looked at me and snickered. _That is true._

I rolled my eyes. "You can say that again."

Jack was watching me closely. "So you really can speak to him. That's so cool!"

"It's not that muchâ€¦" I said with a shrug. "I'm still curious about all the invisible people you were talking to yesterday. Do you think I can meet them?"

Jack hesitated. "Probably not considering Toothiana's been here the whole time and you haven't seen her at all."

"She has? Who is she, anyway?"

"It would be a lot easier if I showed you. Here, come down below."

Jack led me to a trapdoor I had failed to notice before and gestured for me to follow him. I did after asking Toothless if that was okay. He said it was and that he'd be talking to Roxy.

So I went after Jack and the door behind me fell shut.

It was much lighter than I'd expected. It was almost like there was sunlight below decks, but something was very unnatural about it. When I asked Jack he called it electricity. He couldn't tell me how it worked, though.

"Just think of it as magic light that uses a lot of complicated stuff to make," he said. "Oh, and you may want to avoid it. It hurts if you touch it. Like being hit by lightning, you know?"

I wasn't sure, but I nodded.

"Each person on the ship has a room down here," Jack explained. "Except for North; his room is the cabin upstairs you went into yesterday. Remember it?"

I blinked, completely caught off guard by the question. I was too busy looking around the narrow hallway. "Yeah, I do."

"Anyway, most of us customize or have our rooms custom-made so they fit our personalities. The cool thing about Bunny is that he did all the designs in his room by himself. I guarantee you'll be impressed."

Jack stopped in front of a door and knocked twice before pushing it open.

"Bunny! I'm invading!" He laughed at some response I didn't hear and gestured me inside. "It'll be much better if I have pictures to show you. Besides, Bunny's got some mad painting talent. He can paint the perfect likeness of anyone."

I stepped inside. I stopped. And I stared with my mouth hanging open. Everything about it was amazing. The ceiling as the sky, the wall that looked like land, a little village, some other strange markings I'd never seen before. It was indescribable.

Jack closed the door behind us. "I don't think I'm the right person to explain all this to you, so I won't. When you see Bunny someday I'll make sure he answers all your questions."

I didn't reply.

"Hey, Hiccup?"

"Yeah?"

"Turn around and I'll tell you about all the invisible people on this ship."

I did as I was told. Jack motioned for me to sit so I did. Then he began to explain what those pictures we were sitting before meant.

"I'll start with the Bunnyâ€¦"

Aurora Borealis (Jack's POV)

I hadn't meant to keep Hiccup for so long, but the more I spoke the more I wanted to tell him. I told him just about everything I could about everyone. Well, okay, that's a bit of a lie. I basically told him a bit about each Guardian's duties and how they were born. I went in the order that was on the walls: Bunny, Tooth, North, and Sandy.

I found it quite funny that Bunny would constantly correct my story of him, forcing me to speak and threatening with his boomerang. Him, not so much. Come to think of it, I must've looked crazy laughing and insisting my intentions to an indent in the bed (from Hiccup's

perspective " he even asked me if that was where Bunny was simply because there was _that_ indent).

I did tell Hiccup everything I could about Sandy considering he's well and he wouldn't be able to tell his story without dreams anyway.

I did leave North's past as vague as possible.

Hiccup noticed. Guess he's the brightest person I've ever talked to. Then again, he's the only "person" I've ever talked to, so to speak. He asked about North, to which I said, "Can't tell you a thing about him. You'll lose all the magic of the story if North doesn't tell it to you! Besides, I think you two would get along the best so if there's anyone I need you to believe in, it's him."

"Okay then!" He didn't question my judgment, just listened.

I clasped my hands together (leaving my staff on the floor) and did a brief recap at the end. "So basically, the Tooth Fairy collects teeth because they hold your most precious childhood memories. You get to see them when you need them most. The Sandman sends you dreams that bring you happiness, even if you have none at home. Santa Claus, or North as we call him, gives presents on Christmas, which apparently is a lot like your holiday" what was it?"

"Snoggletog."

"Snoggletog. And the Easter Bunny uses Easter to jumpstart spring as a hopeful holiday."

Hiccup looked a bit overwhelmed. "Okay then. That's that's a lot to take in all at once."

"You'll get it soon," I encouraged. "Besides, I'll make sure you believe in everyone so you can just ask them your questions personally one of these days."

"I hope so," he said.

I got up and stretched. "Well, I'm getting a bit hungry. What say you to some lunch?"

"It's fine, really."

"I insist! Henrietta and Gerard make some of the most amazing things ever! Here, I'll go grab it!"

"No need, bucco," Bunny said from the bed. "I rang for Phi earlier. He'll probably be bringing the food up soon."

And right on cue I heard heavy footsteps. I grinned. "Thanks Bunny." Then to Hiccup, "Food's here."

I opened the door before Phil could knock and took the tray from him. "Thanks! My compliments to the chef or chefs in advance."

Then I turned back to Hiccup. "We can just eat in here."

He looked up at the plate I handed him curiously. "What is that?"

"Pizza with basil, tomatoes, and mozzarella cheese. Oh, is that white sauce? Yum!" I smiled as I handed Bunny his plate. "Have you never had a slice of pizza before, Hiccup?"

"Never heard of it." He took a bite and Bunny and I watched as his face lit up. "This is really good!"

"Well then, I'll let the kitchen staff know."

Bunny and I didn't eat; we were too busy being amused at how much Hiccup was enjoying his pizza. The poor pizza was gone in an instant. So was mine when I offered it to him.

"I'd have thought he'd never eaten in his life," Bunny observed.

"Couldn't agree with you more, Cottontail."

"What?" asked Hiccup, looking up with his cheeks half-stuffed.

I shook my head and tried not to laugh. "Nothing. But if you're done eating, I'll take you back up."

"Okay. I was interested in seeing your room, though."

"Maybe next time."

As we were leaving I noticed Hiccup staring at the bed. "Something up?"

"No, it's nothing. I just thought that for a moment there I saw a shadow—never mind. Probably my imagination."

I doubted it, but I let it slide.

The Ship (Toothless's POV)

Once Hiccup was gone, I made my way over to the Gronkle. She froze slightly when she saw me, but I wasn't all too surprised by that reaction. Most dragons were wary of me at best. Still, I tried to be as friendly as possible instead of stiff, though I treated her with respect.

"Greetings, sister of stone," I murmured, falling into respectful speech.

"And to you, brother of night." She bowed. "It is unusual to see another dragon free of the Queen's control so far north. Especially you. If I recall correctly you were her most willing servant."

"And now I am fortunate to be away from it."

"Tell me, brother of night, what news of the unholy alliance. Is she still in powers with the Dark One?"

"Toothless," I corrected. "There is no need for such

formalities."_

"_Then, Toothless, please call me Roxy. It is the name given to me by the immortal of ice, Jack Frost."_

"_Roxy, then. I fear what you ask is true, but I wouldn't know. It has been over ten suns since I have last been to the nest, and a relief to be so far away from it."_

"_I can imagine."_

"_I noticed your wing is injured. May I inquire as to how this occurred?"_

She snuffed slightly. "_That is a very long story. It is a shame I cannot fly at this point in time, but I am glad. If it were not for the boy called Jack shooting me down from the sky, I would still be in the control of both the Queen and the Dark One."_

"_Please,"_ I asked, "_if it does not trouble you, would you be willing to share your mind with me? I am curious as to how you came about to this ship. And the people you have come to believe in. Besides, it would make us communicating much easier."_

She agreed. "_Indeed, this would simplify things quite a bit. And I am also curious as to how you have managed a soul bond with a human. This is no ordinary feat."_

We bent towards each other and closed our eyes. Our heads rested against one another's and I sighed from the feeling of information flowing into my now-open mind. Roxy shivered slightly at mine and we pulled away.

"_Wowâ€¦!"_ I breathed as I saw their attack south. "_Was this doing of the Dark One?"_

"_Indeed. And the boy's weakened soul bond?"_

"_Yes. I haven't a doubt."_

"_But I am impressed as to how you both completed this. No doubt this has uncanny powers considering your strength. And the boyâ€¦his exterior is weak but I sense a strong inner fire about him. Not like ours, but not unlike ours at the same time."_

I bowed. "_This was what I noticed about him the day we created the bond. This was what made me move towards it rather than away."_

"_You have not told him about the Dark One, I noticed."_

"_I have not. I am worried for Hiccup. He is still young for a human, and full of innocence. I wouldn't want this to be destroyed quite yet."_

"_There is a block in his mind,"_ she said. "_Whether you can sense it or not, I am not sure. But there are some memories he is keeping locked away on purpose. I do not know what they pertain to, but they are obviously darker days. I wouldn't pry, but it would be good that he could open up to you all the way as well."_

A block in Hiccup's mind? I hadn't been expecting that? Then again, Gronkles were best known among our kind to have the keenest senses of emotion. They are often known as weak simply because they can understand human emotions unlike the rest of us.

Once upon a time I believed that they were weak too. Now I could understand this "weakness" because of the soul bond. Emotions were complex, deep thoughts that were very confusing and hardly completely clear. Being filled with Hiccup's was something, but feeling my own that was another experience.

Roxy could see me understand. _"It seems that the soul bond has only shown you a broader world, has it not Toothless?"_

"_Indeed it has," _I admitted. _"A new and strange world indeed. But somehow I do not mind it in the slightest. It has only done me good, and I am not ashamed to admit my life has been changed for the better because of it. I would never give it up."_

"_I am glad to hear this."_

"_If I may ask, what has life been like on this ship? And who are the beings that Jack spoke of earlier? Do you see all of them?"_

"_I do."_

"_Could you tell me about them? Perhaps my believing in them can affect Hiccup's sight as well. And I will know what they look like because of the minds we shared."_

Roxy bowed. _"An interesting theory. I would be honored to share what I know with you."_

She spoke of each Guardian and creature. I referenced the images from her mind and listened. It took quite some time and I was hungry by the end of it. Roxy looked up past my shoulder.

"_Your master is back."_

I looked. Hiccup was there with Jack. He waved to me. _"I should go."_

"_Goodbye, Toothless. I enjoyed our conversation."_

"_As did I. Thank you, Roxy."_

With that, I headed back to where Hiccup was waiting. Hopefully my theory would work.

The Ship (Hiccup's POV)

Coming back up onto deck, I turned and called, "Toothless!"

At the mention of his name Toothless excused himself from the Gronkle and came over to me. Jack laughed a bit as he purred and nudged against my hand. I patted his head gently.

_You smell different, _he noted.

"Do I? It's probably from what I ate."

Toothless didn't ask about it any further than, _Was it good?_

"The best."

I turned back to Jack. "Thanks for everything. I should probably get going. People back home already wonder where I am because of Toothless."

"Right. I guess I'll be seeing you around then?"

"Tomorrow sound good?"

Jack grinned. "You're always welcome!"

"Thanks."

"Who knows," he added. "Maybe you'll be able to see some of the others tomorrow!"

"Maybe I will." And I believed those words.

We took off, Jack waving from the deck. The ship slowly vanished from sight as we gained altitude. I let my ears pop with a forced yawn before turning Toothless towards the cove. We flew in silence for a few minutes.

"Did you have a good talk with the Gronkle?" I asked. "What was her name again?"

Roxy. And yes, it was nice to speak to a fellow dragon again. Not that I mind just talking to you.

"Thanks bud. I enjoy your company too. What did you talk about?"

The invisible beings. We shared minds and she explained everything.

" 'Shared minds?' "

It's quite complicated. I'll explain later. And you with Jack?

"He told me about the Guardians as well."

More silence. We were slowly lowering in altitude as the mountains came back into view.

_Do you believe him? _Toothless finally asked me. _Of those other spirits he speaks of?_

"You know bud, I'm not sure. Maybe a little? It all seems too elaborate to be just made-up. Yet at the same timeâ€¦the holidays and customs from places far away. I don't know what to think of it."

Those ceremonies do seem quite complicated. I didn't understand many of the words Roxy said.

I sighed. "And neither did I when Jack did. You're not alone about that."

But I do believe in all of them. And I feel you will too.

"Really?" I was surprised Toothless did. "Okay then! Great."

We landed safely in the cove. I slid off of Toothless and stretched. "Well, I don't know about you, but whoever made that food today deserves to be believed in."

He snuffed at my joke before finishing the fish he'd left that morning. I took time to write everything I could remember about Jack and his stories in my notebook. Then I thought: come to think of it, we landed much more easily than ever. I was a bit surprised by that when it happened.

"Do you think the soul bond helped with our flying? I asked Toothless.

I wouldn't be too surprised. The bond was fully completed when we were flying yesterday.

"Let me guess, after I tossed the cheat sheet!"

Yes! How did you know?

"I felt warmth and confidence then that I never felt before. It was like fire. Right here." I pointed to my heart. "I might've blamed adrenaline yesterday, but I think I know better now."

I could feel Toothless's smile. _I could explain more about the connection, if you'd like._

I looked up at the sun and gauged its distance. "I'd love to bud, but it's almost midday. I need to get back before anyone gets too suspicious."

He nodded, understanding. I went up and gave him a hug.

"I wish I could stay here longer."

Me too.

"I'll try to be back this afternoon. There shouldn't be dragon training."

_Okay. _I let go of him. _Be safe._

"You too bud."

And with that I left the cove and went straight to the village.

* * *

><p>And Hiccup has learned the magic we call pizza.
XD

_**Atem's Sister Atea **__deserves mention for two reasons: 1.)

finally having me watch __Dragons: Riders of Berk__ and 2.) helping me sort out some stuff last chapter. I had to edit a minor detail. Hiccup and the Vikings should know days and up on the calendar because they had that. Hours and downâ€|there's no solid proof of it yet.__

_Yes, the show used American-friendly systems (measurements and time), but I'll be keeping that out of Berk for historical accuracy. And now that I've watched the series, those characters may be popping up in the fic from time to time.__

_It's officially illegal for me to die before June 20, 2014. I'm sure you all know why.__

_And my Flickr and Tumblr accounts are now open! Just go to my profile for the links. Please note that the Flickr account is a bit sparse in pictures because I still need to get a camera cord to upload my pics on my DSLR.__

_That's about it. As always, thank you for everyone who left a review. If you'd like, leave a review in the happy box below, send me feedback, critique, etc. etc. I'll be back as soon as I can!__

Sushi

14. Lose Sight of Life, Understand Death

_You've all waited so patiently. Thank you! Writer's block happened, then I was literally swamped with school. All AP classes and whatnot. But I'm back!__

_Notice I changed my username? Yep, henceforth I am Peppered Potato. I felt it was high time I have everything (FF, Tumblr, Flickr, email, etc.) match. Sorry for the confusion.__

_Now then, I was thinking of the line "the village is going to throw a party to celebrate" and this came out. Happy reading.__

* * *

><p>14 â€" Losing Sight of Life, Understanding Death

* * *

><p>Berk: The Chief's House

The welcome home/congratulations-Hiccup-is-no-longer-so-useles s feast was well under way. Many of the men and women were enjoying a drink or two (or ten), their first(s) after their long voyage trying to find the nest. As unsuccessful as it was, the harrowing ordeal was over and they could finally go home and rest. After the meal, of course.

There had been a moment of silence on the first night of celebrating to honor the fifteen or so men and women who hadn't made it home. Afterwards, there was much merriment. The feast wasn't as large as some in past years due to the lack of food in stock for the coming

winter months, but no one seemed to mind at all. They were all too busy swapping stories and enjoying life. Especially the surprising turn of events in a certain young Viking's life regarding his social standing.

For once, Stoick the Vast was proud of his son.

It wasn't that he never loved Hiccup. Far from it. He cared about the boy's wellbeing more than his own at most times. It was something that ate away at his mind, leaving sleepless nights and constant prayers to the gods in its wake. No, Stoick never loved anyone as much as his only son and heir.

Except for Valhallarama, of course.

Stoick allowed himself a moment to think about his beloved Val. He tried to avoid memories of her " simple things such as her cooking or reading a younger Hiccup stories, to something as audacious as the way she would laugh whenever she had one too many drinks " because they would bring upon a mix of melancholy emotions that he couldn't face on a day-to-day basis. Just saying her name could bring a bout of depression that kept Stoick indoors and away from society.

No, Stoick usually didn't think of his late wife. If he did, it would only occur when he asked her for guidance. And all of her guidance was on the way to raise Hiccup.

The chief removed his hat and stared at it lovingly.

"Oh Val," he sighed, "you should be here."

The hat, as all hats do, didn't respond, but Stoick continued to speak anyway.

"You were the one who could talk to him and make him listen. It was always yer opinion he was most keen on. And ever since you left us, he's changed. Whether that's a good thing or not only the gods can tell." Stoick sighed. "He never speaks of you, Hiccup that is. Always alone and doin' thing no one understands. You know, I apprenticed him to Gobber hopin' it'd help ta bring the Viking in him out, but all it's done is isolate him and put him further from me.

"But things have changed. I didn't want him to be in Dragon Training, but Gobber insisted. And I listened. And things have been good since then. Hiccup's done well. He's excelling, Val, for the first time in his life! Except for learning his runes of course. I cannot forget you were the one to teach him that."

Stoick laughed a bit. "I heard that he's been spending time with the Ingerman boy again, just like when they were wee lads. Always holin' up in the Hall of Records after dinner. He's been going out a lot, our Hiccup. Gobber figures he's not sure how to deal with the sudden popularity. I think it's good that he gets the time to clear his head in the woods. Too much time in the forge is bad for him.

"Then again, his mind is dangerous as it is. Not that you ever cared, Val." Stoick smiled sadly at the hat one last time. "You were always so proud of his imagination. Always tellin' 'im it was a blessing."

There was a knock on the door that stopped the chief mid-thought. He stood up from the chair by the fire, placing the hat on his head before answering the door. It was Gobber; today he was sporting his drinking hand: the tankard.

"You comin', Stoick? All the villagers are wonderin' where you've been up to."

"Tell them I'll be there in a moment," he said.

Gobber was about to leave when he stopped and turned around. "I was wonderin', are you goin' to hold a council about the last raid?"

Stoick frowned. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that the islands further west were attacked. I told you yesterday, Bertha says her daughter was taken. Things are gettin' more serious. Not to mention everyone in the Meridian of Misery is short on food. The devils have picked the island clean, and at this point it's too risky to send out fishing parties."

"I know, Gobber. More than you can imagine."

"Well, I could always try."

The cheeky grin they exchanged was one from their childhoods. Stoick was the first to break away from it, sighing heavily. "Oh Gobber, what am I supposed to do? There's little hope now, not that there was much to begin with."

Gobber patted his friend on the back with his one good hand. "Cheer up, old friend. You may be chief, but you've gotta remember there's a whole island backin' you up. Besides, today is a time of celebration. Hiccup is finally provin' his worth. Surely that is somethin' ta take yer mind offa things."

"Yer probably right, as always," he nodded grudgingly.

"Probably? I think you should give me a little more credit here, Stoick."

The chief just laughed and smacked Gobber playfully on the arm. "Come. I shouldn't keep everyone waitin' any longer."

Gobber grinned. "That's the spirit! Now come, I want ya to be there when I announce which two youngsters are going to fight in the finals for the honor of killing the Nightmare."

"Gobber, wait."

The double amputee stopped. "Yeah Stoick?"

"I was wonderin' if you could do something for me."

"Well, if it's within my power, than anythin'."

"I wantedâ€|aw, never mind."

"Nonsense! Spit it out already!"

"I wanted to give Hiccup something. Just a small gift, mind you, but I'm goin' ta need yer help."

Gobber thought for a second before smiling and clapping his friend on the shoulder. "I'm all ears. Let's talk about it on the way down then."

The two walked off shoulder to shoulder, soon falling into comfortable conversations and laughing jovially. For once, Stoick the Vast left behind his tough, leader-like persona behind.

He was just another person off to a party today.

Berk: Village Center

Astrid was stalking away from the Great Hall. She wasn't in the mood for celebrating to say the least, especially celebrating the one they called Hiccup. She knew he was a dirty cheat; the only thing the determined Hofferson was missing was the proof.

She twirled her heavy axe in anger. It wasn't fair! The only reason Hiccup was getting this much attention was because he had been a failure all of his life. That, and that his father was chief and everyone knew he would become chief someday. If he wasn't caught for being a dirty cheat, that was.

Astrid growled a bit in frustration. She was going to get to the bottom of this one way or another. She promised herself that.

Lately she had been thinking too much of Hiccup. Way too much. He seemed to occupy at least half of her thoughts, and it was getting to the point of unbearable. Astrid could barely work out without him distracting her. HE was the reason she was doing this, after all; if he hadn't been cheating (because he was, despite what everyone said about her being "jealous") Astrid wouldn't be so out of her element.

He had taken away the only thing she was good at.

Breaking into a run, she rounded the corner and sprinted down towards the center of the village. During Snoggletog there would be a great tree of painted wood decorating the vacant circular space there, but it served as a popular meeting spot when the holiday season was no longer in. The emptiness was reassuring for Astrid.

She hopped over wooden base with expert nimbleness gained through years of work and slid to a stop on the dirt path. Someone was coming. Astrid narrowed her eyes. It wasn't just one someone, but two someones. The twins.

It was a pretty regular sight for Astrid; they were approaching from the west side, the docks. They were known for playing pranks on people, harmless things like slicing sails or taking the rudders off. She and Ruffnut had an interesting friendship and would talk about girl things when they were alone. Today Tuffnut was with her. They walked side by side without looking at each other. Again, not unusual. Astrid waited for them. Usually they walked faster. The pace was exasperating.

Neither seemed to notice her as they walked by. Astrid ticked inside at the rejection, more mixed feelings stabbing at her heart. No doubt they thought she wasn't cool enough to hang out, let alone say hello to.

"Hey," she snapped.

The both stopped and turned in unison. Everything about this was normal. Yet Astrid could almost instantly tell this was different than usual. Both twins looked close to tears.

"Hey," she said again, more kindly this time, "are you two okay?"

Tuffnut scowled and turned away with his hands in his pocket as if to act nonchalant, but Astrid could see it wasn't natural. His figure was too stiff, hands shaking through the thin material of his pants. Ruffnut rubbed her eyes and coughed before replying, though she wouldn't meet Astrid's eyes.

"We're fine. We were just about to head out for a bit. You know, sibling bonding."

"Since when did you ever bond?" The question came flying out of her mouth before she could stop it.

Thankfully, Tuffnut seemed just as confused. "Yeah, since when have we ever bonded?"

"Idiot!" his twin hissed. "I was trying to cover up that we were leaving to grieve, but you're too stupid to keep you dumb mouth shut."

"Funny considering you just spilled the fact that we're grieving," he muttered.

"Grieve?" Astrid was confused. "Grieve about what?"

Neither of them replied. Both looked uncomfortable. Astrid made her dissatisfaction obvious.

"Fine, don't tell me. See that I care."

"Our dad's dead!" Tuff exploded, much to both girls' shock. He looked up, eyes shining, and cleared his throat. "Our dad was killed on the last raiding party, okay? There. Now you have you answer. Happy?"

Suddenly Astrid was put on the spot. She felt her face coloring in embarrassment and shame. "Odin, guys, I'm so sorry. I wish I could say something."

"Don't," Ruff cut in with the wave of a hand. "Nothing we can do. Just like our baby sister, ya know. They're gone. So I'd rather not talk about it."

"Me neither."

For once the twins were in agreement. Astrid nodded slowly. "I understand."

"Do you?" Tuff spat. "Have you ever understood what any of us _feels_ like, Astrid?"

"I don't understand what you mean by that."

"Course not. You've always been good at everything. Everything's been good for you. But things haven't been good to some people, you know. It's not exactly easy having to raise your mother!"

"Tuff," his sister warned, but she was ignored.

"We've lost our sister. Now what? We've gone and lost our dad too. How's Mom going to live through this?"

"We're Vikings," said Astrid levelly, "fighting a war. There's always going to be casualties. We need to be stronger than that and take whatever challenges the gods give us. That the Viking way and you know it."

He turned his back on her. Astrid snorted. "Yeah, real mature. A true gentleman."

Tuffnut didn't take her words kindly at all.

"You know, dragons'll become our friends sooner than you'd become nicer to others!" he shouted before running away.

"Grow a spine!" Astrid yelled back.

"SHUT UP, BITCH!"

Ruffnut sighed and turned to her friend, knowing his words probably stung. "I'm sorry about that idiot. He's always angrier when bad stuff happens."

"I thought you were too," the other blonde noted.

Ruff smirked. "Yeah, I usually am. But I'm too sad. And tired of being sad. I just can't be angry right now."

Astrid looked away guiltily. "I'm really sorry. Truly, I am. I wish I hadn't said that to Tuff. It's just been a bad day."

"You can say that again."

They stood there awkwardly. Suddenly, Hiccup appeared from the road leading from the woods. He glanced at them with a slight wave. Astrid pointedly ignored it while Ruff smiled a bit and returned the wave. Hiccup took her invitation and walked over.

"Um, I just saw Tuffnut running towards the woods. Is he okay?"

"Maybe. If not, I'll go and drag him home by the ears," Ruff said casually. However Astrid could hear how her usual banter was forced.

Unfortunately, Hiccup did too. "Is something wrong?"

"Nothing," she choked out. "Actually, I think I'll go get my idiot brother before he hurts himself worse than usual or something. Well, bye."

And then she was gone. Hiccup and Astrid stood facing one another while watching Ruffnut leave; worry clouded Astrid's features, confusion on Hiccup's.

"Okay, that wasn't normal," he stated.

"You don't say."

"They were crying," he observed.

Astrid rolled her eyes at his matter-of-factness. "No, it was just allergies."

Hiccup grinned at her in a way that made her gut churn. It was that wacky grin he got whenever there was a joke or weird comment on the tip of his tongue. Astrid wanted more than anything to punch him, but she couldn't think of an excuse.

So instead she huffed and muttered, "If you've got something to say, just spit it out already."

"No no," Hiccup insisted, "I just thought, 'Gee, since when has Astrid used sarcasm?'"

"What's that supposed to mean?" she snapped.

"Nothing! Nothing! It's just that you've always been so serious. It's almost a relief to see you acting more human and less Viking once in a while."

When Astrid stared at him, Hiccup's face clouded pink and he began to wave his hands in front of him defensively, stuttering.

"I-I-I-I mean, yo-you're so good at everything. Way better than I'll ever be!"

"Is this your attempt at flattery?" Astrid asked. "Because if it is, it's not working."

"No! No, don't take it like that. Please don't. That would be really awkward."

The Vikingess had an odd urge to laugh at Hiccup's discomfort. It was a€|endearing in its own way. Astrid snapped back into her normal mindset, shaking the thought away. Why was he doing that to her? She hated him for that!

Hiccup coughed and continued. "What I meant to say was that I've always beenâ€¦Hiccup-y? And you're just so Astrid sometimes. I guess that's where Snotlout is right; you are so you. And I've always admired that about you. And it's not like that's a bad thing or anything, being yourself that is, but it's likeâ€¦I feel likeâ€¦likeâ€¦"

The axe was on his throat in an instance. "Tell me what you want before I get tired of letting you talk."

"It's like you have to be perfect."

Astrid hadn't been expecting that. She paled, backing up. "What did you say?"

"I feel like you've always been trying so hard to be perfect. Flawless. Ever since we were kids, there was nothing anyone could say about you that was bad."

He trailed off. Astrid watched him closely. There went his hand, flying up to push the hair around. Bangs through to the back of the head. His nervous tic. She'd seen it too many times before. But never around her. So he was nervous around her? Astrid never noticed that before.

And what he had saidâ€¦

"How could you know that? You don't know anything about me!"

"I know." She hadn't been expecting that bluntness. "You're right. I don't know anything about you. Just like you don't know anything about me."

"What's that supposed to mean?" He didn't reply. "Hiccup?"

Hiccup's eyes met hers; he breathed once, mouth opening slowly as though there was a moment of uncertainty in the actionâ€¦

"Hiccup! Astrid!"

â€¦and the moment ended. The two turned to see Fishlegs running over with a grin on his face, completely unaware of the situation.

He stopped before them, panting. "Thank gods I found you! I've been looking everywhere except the middle of the village. Typical. I can't imagine the most obvious place for something important!"

"'Legs," Hiccup interrupted, patting him on the back, "slow down. What's up?"

Managing to catch his breath, Fishlegs began to talk. "Snotlout sent me out to look for you two and the twins. The party's started and everyone's wondering where everyone else has vanished to."

Hiccup grinned and opened his arms wide. "Well, we're here."

"Ruff and Tuff left for a walk," Astrid said. "No biggie. They'll probably show up later this evening."

Hiccup looked at Astrid with a strange expression. She refused to return his questioning glances. Fishlegs didn't notice that interaction either. Instead, he smiled and grabbed both of their arms.

"Great! Let's get going. We saved you all seats."

Astrid nodded. She peeked a glance over at Hiccup. His face was somewhere between shock, confusion, nervousness, andâ€¦was that a smile? A genuine smile? It had to be; that crooked, awkward, Hiccup

smile.

"You guys saved me a seat?" he asked.

Fish nodded. "Of course! We're all friends here after all."

"Friendsâ€¦"

Even Astrid could see the word roll strangely off the skinny boy's tongue as if he wasn't sure what to make of it. He repeated it again under his breath, still smiling, but something about it wasn't quite the same. It wasn't as genuine.

As though the word seemed fake to him.

Astrid left it at that, but she knew something in that moment. There wasn't a doubt in her mind that Hiccup was hiding something. Something big. And it probably had something to do with his cheating. This wasn't a fluke; all Astrid needed was proof.

Then she could get some rest from those strange feelings about Hiccup while she was at it.

Berk: The Great Hall (Hiccup's POV)

Snotlout grinned as Fishlegs dragged me and Astrid to the table by the fire. "Coz!"

"'Coz?'" I asked.

"Just 'cuz." He began to laugh hysterically at his joke. "Get it? Because 'cuz it sounds like coz!"

I laughed weakly (not that Snotlout noticed). "Right. Homophones. Really witty, Snot."

"What's a homophones?"

"Not important," I brushed off, his confusion being more authentic than my laughter. "So why did you call me coz as a greeting?"

He shrugged. "Thought I'd try it out, now that you're not a loser anymore. What do you say to that?"

Though the compliment was based on my secret, I forced my sickening stomach down and a smile up onto my face. "Well, if you want to call me that, I have nothing against it."

"Awesome!"

He slapped me on the shoulder â€" hard, knocked the wind right out of me â€" and forced me to sit beside him. I rubbed the area, knowing it would probably bruise. Then Snotlout completely ignored me, his attention focused on Astrid. Not that I blamed him; I made poor company to most anyway.

As he went "Hey babe" to her, I turned to Fish, who had taken the seat across from me. Our eyes met. I rolled mine and nudged my head sideways towards Snot. Fishlegs grinned. He leaned forward to speak

to me, practically half-screaming over the din of partying Vikings. I propped my elbows on the table so my chin was balanced on my knuckles and cocked my head to the side to listen.

"You think he'll ever succeed?" he asked.

"For our sakes, I hope not. Last thing I want to deal with in adulthood is a constantly angry Astrid."

He laughed. "I guess that's true. Not like we have many options, though."

I sighed and rested my head in a hand. "Trust me, I'm trying not to think about romance at this point in my life."

"You have a good chance now. To get a date, that is. I know Ruffnut's been keeping a more-than-keen eye on you."

I tried not to visibly flinch. "Too bad for her I have absolutely no feelings like that."

"Not to anyone?" I wasn't surprised by how skeptical Fishlegs sounded.

I shrugged, trying not to look towards Astrid. "Not really. Too busy training and upholding my future position as chief, you know. No biggie. No pressure."

Snot heard that. His beefy arm found its way around my shoulder as he pulled me closer. "Right! Can't forget about you anymore, can we Hiccup?"

"Umâ€¦what?"

"You're gonna be chief sooner or later. I should probably lift more so I can protect your skinny butt in battle. I mean, sure you can take the dragons out, but you'll definitely need my help when people are involved."

"Riiiiightâ€¦"

"I mean, you might be able to train up," he added quickly in case he hurt my feelings. "Might."

"Probably not."

"Yeah, definitely not happening."

We were silent until Snotlout turned back to Astrid and wrapped an arm around her. I was free (apparently holding two people's shoulders was awkward, even for Snot), but Astrid didn't look happy by the attention.

"Can't forget about the lady in the house now can we?" Great, there was that slick tone of 'I'm-obviously-hitting-on-you' again. "Anyway Astrid, as I was sayingâ€¦"

"No need, Snotlout," she interjected.

He ignored it and continued. "You really should come down and see my

new room sometime. Lots of training stuff: agility, weights, flexibility. You name it, I've got it. Plus, the basement is super safe during a raid. I could totally protect you and stuff."

"Oh really?"

Fishlegs and I exchanged a glance. That tone could not mean anything good.

"Let me ask you this, Snotlout. Since when have I ever needed help?"

He obviously wasn't expecting that. "Um, what?"

"I don't think I've ever needed your help. Last I checked I can hold my own. I've been holding my own. Without your help."

"But babeâ€" "

"Don't 'babe' me, Snotlout. Think for a second. How many times have I had to save your sorry butt in dragon training? Or any training for that matter. How about when we're on fire patrol?"

Snotlout did the smart thing of remaining silent. Astrid was glaring at him, picking his arm off of her shoulder.

"I thought so," she smirked.

Fishlegs stood, jarring the whole table. "Gee, I'm hungry. Is anyone else hungry? I'll go get us something to eat and drink."

"I'll come too," I said hurriedly, but Fish pushed me back down into my seat.

"No need. You'll be swarmed by people if you do. Be back in a jiffy!"

With that, he made his escape with a nervous giggle. I sighed and slumped down. This wasn't good.

As Astrid continued to rant in anger at Snotlout, I took the time to look around the room. Every resident of Berk was there, except for Gothi and her family. No surprise there.

My gaze continued passed the drunk/drinking people to the high table. There was my dad, swapping jokes with Gobber and Spitelout. Astrid's parents were there too, both sitting away from one another without as much as a glance in the other's direction. Just as the twins were gone, so was their mother. I wondered for a second why. She wasn't the type to miss such merriment.

I turned back to the others. Fish wasn't back yet. Snot looked miserable. Astrid was still chewing him out. As much as I felt he deserved the rude wake-up call, even this was too cruel.

"I wonder where Ruff and Tuff are," I murmured, trying to divert Astrid's anger. It diverted all right. Straight at me.

"Don't you dare try to change the subject, Hiccup!"

"What? No, I was just curious, you know. It's not like them to miss an opportunity to blow up a bunch of things without anyone to witness it. Or, you know, blow up the Great Hall with everyone in it."

"Yeah," cut in Snotlout; to my surprise, he looked thoughtful. "Hiccup's got a point. Why aren't they here?"

"No reason."

Astrid was definitely hiding something, no doubt about it. I turned to her. "They were close to tears when I saw them today. Something's wrong."

"Then we should go find them!"

"No!" she shouted, standing and slamming her hands on the table loud enough for the surrounding Vikings to stare at her. Her face flushed slightly, but she didn't sit. "We should leave them be."

"Why?" asked Snot. He was already half up and ready to take off. "They should be here celebrating with us. I mean, almost everyone got home safe. Isn't that something to be happy about?"

Astrid's glare could've killed. "Did you just hear the words you used. 'Almost everyone.'"

"Yeah. What about it?"

"Did it ever cross your mind that maybe someone important didn't make it home?"

"But everyone's important! So we're here to celebrate that!"

"Maybe some people can't see it that way!"

"Who?" he asked. "Who could possibly think that?"

It was in my dots in my head began to connect. The tears, the disappearance, the offness, the 'someone important.' I gasped and looked straight to Astrid with wide eyes. "What were the names of the fallen?"

She didn't answer. I could tell she knew I knew the truth. "Hiccup, don't."

"Whose names did they say last night?" I demanded.

"Hiccup? What do you mean by that?" Snot asked. He still didn't get it, but I did and I could feel a wide array of emotions triggered within me. Poor, oblivious Snotlout turned to Astrid. "What's he mean by that?"

The words were about to pour out of her. I could tell. But then out of the corner of my eye I saw a very happy looking Fishlegs approaching.

"Wow, you guys have no idea how long the lines have gotten! I was waiting for the longest time!"

"Fish, wait!" I shouted, but it was too late.

"They lost their father, okay?!"

My eyes shut as the words began to ring in my ears. I could feel the magnitude of the words had hit home. We all knew the ruin the Thorston family had gone through after losing their younger daughter in a dragon raid. Only their father had been able to single-handedly pull the family out of ruin. He became a strong figure both in the village and in battle. Hel, the twins idolized him!

And now he was gone.

The silence spreading between the four of us was as thick as a layer of deep-winter snow. No one said a word, so much as breathed. Astrid's face had turned a nasty shade of grey as she realized what she'd said. And we were all in shock by those words.

Fishlegs finally broke the silence, asking, "Ruff and Tuff lost their dad?"

Not one of us would meet his eyes. Fishlegs stood still for another long moment before dropping the plates and cups on the table. He turned towards the door and began to go.

"You're leaving?" Snot asked.

Fish nodded. "I'm going to go find them."

"Why?" Astrid asked.

"Because they need our help."

"If they need help, they should come to us!"

"That's where you're wrong." She blanched like it was a slap to the face. "No one seeks help. That's not the Viking way. So we need to show them that we're here for them, whether they know it or not."

"And is that the Viking way?" she demanded.

"No," he admitted, "it's not. But it's what friends do for one another."

Snotlout hopped up almost immediately. "He's right. What're we waiting for?"

"Nothing," I said and followed him, only to notice Astrid hadn't. So I went back to her. "You okay?"

She didn't answer right away. I was about to shrug it away when she replied softly, "I said some terrible stuff to Tuffnut before he and Ruff went to the forest. Stuff I regret. What if we find them and he won't â€" can't â€" forgive me."

"You've got a point. He may not forgive you."

She looked ready to give up; I'd never seen that out of Astrid before. I tried to meet her eyes, but she averted her gaze. So I

continued.

"But, you won't know unless you try, right?"

I gave her a sheepish grin. Astrid stared at me before scoffing and punching me in the shoulder.

"What was that for?" I asked, rubbing my arm gingerly as she walked off.

"That's for making me upset." I made a begrudging sound, but I swore I heard her laugh at that. "You coming or what?"

"Coming."

I followed her out of the Great Hall and towards the forest. My mind was too focused on finding the twins (and hoping they hadn't accidentally stumbled upon Toothless) to notice Astrid had been dragging me out by my wrist. As in holding it.

I also missed the blush forming on her cheeks and her expression that gave what she was thinking away:

What in the name of the gods am I doing?

Berk: Raven's Point

The crunching broke Tuffnut out of his daze. He wiped his eyes furiously before standing with a spear in his hands. "Who is it? I'm letting you know I'm armed and dangerous."

"Relax, it's just me."

"Oh." Tuffnut sat back down as his sister approached.

She smiled sadly down at him. He didn't look up, knees pulled up to his chest with arms wrapped around them, eyes trained dead ahead. When he finally looked up, he snapped. "What?"

"Nothing. I was just making sure you weren't eaten by a dragon or something."

"That's silly. What dragon would hide out in the middle of a forest?"

"Um, _every_ dragon, idiot."

"Oh."

Ruff sat down next to her brother. They didn't face each other, nor did they shy away. Despite the constant bickering the two were actually closer than most people ever could become. Finally, Ruffnut decided to break the silence.

"Hey, Tuff?"

"Yeah Ruff?"

The sister hesitated. "Do you think Mom'll be okay?"

"â€| "

"Tuff?"

"I don't wanna talk about it." His voice had a more bitter edge to it.

Ruff and Tuff knew they weren't the sharpest tools in the box. But what they also knew was that despite the playful/violent banters and their near-constant arguments, they constantly had, they could always rely on each other. Because they practically thought the same. And they knew the other was thinking about the day they lost their little sister. The day the dragon swooped down and plucked her away screaming.

It was the day they lost their mother's sanity.

She'd been lost, staring constantly at blank walls without getting up to eat or sleep. Only their father had done anything after that day. He regained his family's honor by fighting with the chief through all the raids afterwards, vowing to avenge the loss of his youngest.

The twins had seen that. That was the father they knew: strong, kind, invincible, brave.

"I think," Tuffnut said finally, "I'm gonna have to start pumping iron at Snot's place or something."

His sister laughed. "Since when have you thought, let alone pump iron."

He shrugged. "Worth a shot. Gotta get strong after all."

"Yeahâ€| "

More silence. It was getting unbearable.

"Why did he have to die?"

The question Tuff asked hung heavy in the air. For once his sister couldn't come up with a witty retort. She just swallowed hard at the lump in her throat and shrugged.

"Gods willing."

"I get that, but why him?" Tuffnut finally turned, looking desperate. "I mean, he could still be out there alive right?"

"Tuffâ€| "

"Or if he isâ€| gone, I don't get why no one else is. The other adults have been fighting just as long as him, but they don't die. Our chief doesn't even have a scratch on him! So why did Dad have to die?"

He was heaving, doing everything in his power not to cry. Ruff was too, but she felt the tears running down her face. She wiped them away furiously to no avail. They heard birds and wind and rustling undergrowth, but nothing else. Except a few shouting voices in the

distance, but who cared about that.

Waitâ€¦voices?

Ruff stood up. "Do you hear that?"

"What, the voices? Yeah, I wish they'd shut up. It's annoying."

"No, listen, idiot. They're saying our names."

Tuffnut gained some interest and stood up as well. Sure enough, the voices sounded like those of people they knew. Again and again: Ruff! and Tuff! The twins didn't say anything in return.

Soon they heard footsteps crashing through the forest. Then Gobber arrived.

"See!" he shouted, "I toldja I'd find them safe and sound."

Out from behind the trees came Fishlegs, followed by Astrid and Snotlout, Hiccup taking the rear. All of them looked anxious and worried. It made Ruffnut feel weak. She turned away and began to rub her face furiously.

"What're you all looking at?" she demanded.

Tuff didn't say a thing. He just turned around so his back faced the others.

The twins suddenly made indignant sounds as they were smacked across the backs of their heads. They turned to see Gobber with his arms crossed.

"Now look here, both of ya," he began. "The others here came straight to me to help track you down. We've been lookin' for quite a while now. So I suppose you owe them all a big thank you. Or an apology to me for havin' me dragged out of a perfectly good party."

They exchanged a glance before turning away guiltily. Gobber smiled and patted them both on the shoulders.

"I kid. But you should be thankin' Fishlegs more than anyone. He rallied everyone up after you."

Ruffnut looked under Gobber's arm to where Fishlegs stood. He awkwardly waved before offering them both a hug. It was so ridiculous that she began to sob, laughing and blubbering.

Gobber smiled a bit. "Aye, that's the spirit. Cry as much as you need. There's no shame in bein' upset for losing someone you love dearly. We can all relate to that."

Tuffnut took that opportunity to let some tears go. Snotlout immediately went to comfort him. Hiccup went by where Ruff and Fish were, leaving Astrid on her own. She stood for a moment before going up to Tuff.

He glared at her. "What do you want?"

"I'm sorry. For what I said earlier. It was wrong of me."

Tuffnut stared at her. "Wait, _you're_ apologizing?"

Though Astrid looked peeved, she said, "Yes."

"Okay, who are you and what did you do to the real Astrid? Real Astrid doesn't apologize."

She punched him. Hard. "I am now, so take it or leave it."

"Okay, you're the real deal," he said.

Astrid, being out of her element, didn't know what else to do. Finally Tuffnut grinned and punched her back, but lightly. "You're forgiven, but only because I'm in a good mood. Normally this deadly beast would have your head on a spike."

"Is that a challenge?"

"Only if you want it to be."

"Enough!" said Gobber. "We best be gettin' back before nightfall. Which, I'd like to point out, isn't that far away."

The teens quickly gathered and began on their way home. Ruff was able to sneak a peek at Astrid. The two girls exchanged smiles before going back with the four guys. No one noticed how Hiccup hung back a bit before following Gobber in the very rear.

Berk: The Forge (Hiccup's POV)

I stifled a yawn as I finished my latest entry in my notebook. It was getting late, as usual, and I wasn't ready to go home. The party had been a tiring ordeal and I wasn't exactly keen on seeing people after it. Not to mention what the twins had to go through. I guess spending that much time with Toothless over fellow Vikings wasn't the best idea when building social skills. Still, I didn't regret it one bit.

We were lucky enough to avoid the cove. We swung close when Gobber somehow magically ate dirt and said a Viking had been there not long ago (which was me), but he found their trail soon after and completely ignored the one I had unwittingly made.

Taking my notebook, I flipped to where I had stored all the notes about Night Furies; or more specifically, Toothless. I spread the papers out on my desk with my pencil out, ready to make adjustments to the information on them.

Nothing.

I sighed again and rested my head on my arms, rolling the pencil up and down on my desk. I also checked my pocket watch. It was close to eleven. I put it away. Back to flicking my uneven pencil as evenly as possible.

I heard footsteps outside of the forge. Figuring it was Gobber forgetting something (which isn't exactly uncommon) I ignored the sound until someone came in. And that someone definitely wasn't Gobber. Seeing who it was I jumped up in shock, trying to cover up

the strewn papers. My pencil clattered to the ground.

"Dad! You're back!" Of course I knew he was back; I'd seen him at the party today. Why was he here? He never came to the forge. "Um, Gobber's not here, soâ€" "

"I know." Dad forced his way through the tiny door, an impressive feat if it hadn't been for my nervousness. "I came lookin' for you."

"Y-you did?"

Shut notebook. Try to casually chuckle only to hear a very not-manly giggle.

"You've been keepin' secrets."

Something about the seriousness in his tone scared me. "I, uh, I ha-I have?"

"Just how long did you think you could hide it from me?"

Hide it? My stomach sank to the floor. Impossible. Still, I played dumb, avoiding his eyes and playing around with the papers on my desk.

"I-I-I don't know what you'reâ€" "

"Nothing," he actuated, causing me to flinch and look at him, "happens on this island without me hearin' about it."

"Oh?" My voice came out way too high.

Dad took two steps closer to me so he was no longer hidden in the shadows. But him standing directly in the candlelight wasn't helping him look less ominous.

"Let's talkâ€|about that dragon."

My hand, which had been resting firmly on my notebook, slid. The bundle of parchment fell to the ground. I couldn't feel my body except for a rush of hot blood and cold heart. He knew. He knew everything. Toothless and I were as good as dead now.

"Oh gods," I breathed, running a hand through my hair. "Dadâ€|Dad, I'm so sorry. I-I-I was going to tell you, I justâ€|didn't know how to, uhâ€| "

And that's when I noticed my dad was laughing. Like, actually laughing. I hadn't heard him laughing around me like that in years. Not since Momâ€|wellâ€|

So me getting a Night Fury was that much of a joke to him? I joined him in laughing, though mine sounded scared and reedy with a lot less enthusiasm in comparison until I realized he was laughing. Actually laughing with me. Not cursing me or exiling me or disowning me like he should've been if the conversation had been about Toothless.

Confused, I asked, "Y-you're notâ€|upset?"

"What?" he bellowed. Dad's eyes were shining, his mouth stretched into an enormous grin. "I was hoping for this!"

Well that didn't make any sense. "Umâ€|you were?"

"And believe me, it only gets better! Just wait 'til you spill a Nadder's guts for the first time and mount yer first Gronkle head on a spear! What a feelin'!"

He punched me in the shoulder excitedly and sent me flying into the shelf behind me. I groaned a bit at the pain (no doubt I would have bruises to prove it) and struggled to pick myself up as Dad kept celebrating.

"You really had me goin' there, son! All those years of the worst Viking Berk has ever seen!"

Ouch. Even if that was true, Dad had never said it to my face before.

"Odin, it was rough. I almost gave up on you. And all the while you were holdin' out on me! Oh, Thor Almighty! Ah!" He took a moment to breathe and pull up a stool. "With you doin' so well in the ringâ€|we finally have something to talk about."

I wasn't sure if I should be relieved to have Dad's respect (and my secret safe) or guilt-ridden because I was basically lying to his face. I glanced up at his eager, glowing face for a brief moment before sighing and looking away.

The silence between us stretched to a discomfoting length.

Dad was the one to break it. He reached behind him and pulled out something. "Oh, here. I brought you something, to keep you safe in the ring."

He bent one of the decorative horns back in place before handing it to me. It was a helmet. Though it didn't look like much, it meant a great deal to me. Usually those who make their parents proud are given a helmet in honor of that. The only two people without them in my age group were me and Astrid. And now it was just Astrid.

"Wow, thanks."

"It's not just me you should be thankin'. Gobber helped me forge it to the right size." Stoick cleared his throat before continuing. "Yer mother would've wanted you ta have it. It's half of her breastplate."

My fingers, which had gone to stroke the metal, danced away from the hat at those words. I looked up at Dad sheepishly and laughed.

He smiled back down at me sadly before tapping his own hat. "Matching set. Keeps herâ€|keeps her close, you know?"

I knew.

"Wear it proudly. You deserve it. You've held up yer end of the deal."

My end of the deal. Suddenly, I didn't know exactly how to fake it. I'd basically been lying to everyone about everything involving dragons, but my dad was different somehow. I didn't want there to be any more awkwardness today.

I fake-yawned loudly and stretched. "Well, I really should be getting to bed."

"Yes. Good. Okay, good talk."

I nodded vigorously. "I'll see you back at the house."

"We should do this again," said he.

"Great. Uh, thanks for stopping by."

"Of course, of course!"

"And for the, uh, breast hat."

"I hope you like the hat."

We both cleared out throats in unison. So much for neither of us being awkward.

He nodded once more. "Well, uh, yep, good night."

Dad squeezed out of my door with that. I set my arms on my hips and sighed deeply. This wasn't going to end well, no matter what angle I looked at it. Sooner or later I would have to tell him "and in turn the whole village" my secret, who was probably sleeping in the forest tonight.

I thought to go out and sleep with Toothless again, but decided against it. I'd just told Dad I'd see him back at the house. No need to lie about that now.

Packing everything away and making sure it was hidden away wasn't as easy as I thought it'd be. The fact that I had a visit only proved I needed to be even more careful. I finally found a place in the wooden beams that made up the ceiling. No one would look up there.

Satisfied, I blew out the candle and started the trek back home. I had an odd feeling along the way, as if someone was watching me, but every time I turned around there was no one to be seen. I brushed it off as my paranoid imagination; I mean, who would follow me, right?

Right?

Berk: The Chief's House, Hiccup's Room

Pitch couldn't help but smile as he slipped through the shadows into the boy's room. It was simple, really. He'd followed all of the children since they left the village; it wasn't hard to spot exactly which boy it was who had stolen the Night Fury. He was frail and nervous, always looking behind him. As though he had something to hide.

Hiccup, he'd heard the other children call him. A pathetic name for a pathetic human. Not that Pitch cared. Now that he was here, all he had to do was continue the plan.

There were two Fearlings with him, one in the shape of a horse, the other not yet formed. Pitch's hand snuck into the shapeless black sand and began to weave it expertly. He slowly guided the trail towards Hiccup until it all but consumed his thoughts. It only took a few moments until he saw the boy's features twist in fear.

Pitch sneered. Ah, this was what he was made to do. All the other times he'd simply toyed with the Guardians. Made them worried, scared. But now he knew that they were in his domain now. He made the rules here. He had power.

Like what he was doing now. This, this was a true nightmare. Nothing like the petty things he'd made down south. No, this one was made to corrupt the mind.

As Hiccup began to quake and cold sweat blossomed on his brow Pitch made his leave. The second Fearling quickly allowed its master onto its saddled back as they flew back to the Nest.

Things were finally getting interesting.

The Second Nightmare

I was in a land I'd never seen before. There were no trees, no grass, no green. The land was still, like a long white sheet. The sky was an inky black with grey storm clouds rolling in. And above it was a moon so large it filled half of my vision. It was the only source of light there.

It was winter. Somehow I knew it was winter, pure and undiluted by people.

This wasn't a land where humans lived.

I looked up at the sky, turning my back towards the moon. I could see stars. They twinkled like a million stories all crowded into a black sea. Each had its own color; so many colors that I couldn't name looked down on me.

One by one the stars began to gather and fly in seven diverging directions. The sky went from being littered in life to separate into very distinct paths. Yet a good number of stars in the center fell to the ground. They surrounded me in light, flickering as though they contained the essence of life. Yet as they touched the ground, the glittering stopped, and they became as dead as stone, grey and lifeless.

I turned in a full circle, watching as everything around me became ashes. The moon had lost its glowing quality and slipped into a speedy wane, becoming nothing but a sliver.

Somewhere in the distance I heard a feral howl. I couldn't identify the animal, but it wasn't a pretty sound. It was so loud that it made the ground beneath my feet crack and shake. As it did, I stepped away and stared.

It was in the same pattern as Toothless's scribbles the day we made the soul bond. This time, though, cold water the color of obsidian leaked out of the lines and drowned out the white. As the cold wetness rose I instinctively took a breath. Somehow I knew I was going to be submerged.

It was there, in a flash, that I lost all vision. I knew my eyes were open; I could feel the water pricking at them. And then there was a single moonbeam cutting through the surface high above like a flame through parchment. And in that moonbeam, suspended, was Jack.

I let out a gasp, half my air gone. Trying to swim towards him, I felt my limbs grow heavy. I would've called out if I could, but I couldn't. I watched as the moonlight slowly began to taint him. Jack's hair turned black, his skin grey and shallow. Then he turned towards me. My eyes widened with shock.

These eyes were dark amber. This wasn't the Jack I knew.

He laughed, high and cruel, before shooting me down deeper into the water. I could hear the sound of a low hiss the whole time, but couldn't identify the source. As I went deeper, I began to thrash and reach up towards the surface, desperate for air that wasn't there.

So this was what it was like to drown. It was agony.

Through it all I heard a laugh. This was a cold laugh like the first one I heard in my first dream, but worse. It rocked my entirety like a boulder. I tried to speak, but the fire in my lungs made me incapable. So I used my mind to ask the questions.

"_Please! Help me! I'm drowning."_

"_I know."_

My blood froze more at that. "Who are you? Why won't you help me?"

"_Because I don't need to." It was definitely female. "Ask me more before you die, boy."_

I panicked. I did as she asked.

"_Where am I?" I thought to the laughter. It only giggled at a further, higher pitch. My voice rose to a shout in my mind. "I know you're there, and I know you can hear me! Just give me an answer!"_

"_But I did."_

"_No," I argued, "you really haven't."_

The giggle. "I didn't answer that question. You don't need the answer to that. No, I've answered your greatest question of all."

"_What question?" I asked. There was no reply. "Hello?"_

"_Goodbye, Hiccup."_

And then I saw an arrow of ice make straight for my head.

.

I gasped and sat up in my bed. It was like the last nightmare I had, in which I woke up drenched in sweat and afraid of my surroundings. Hands shaking, I held my head and sobbed emptily. I didn't understand. Why were these abstract dreams scaring me so much? It was as if some divine force was causing these hallucinations, and I couldn't do anything about it.

Standing, I slipped as quietly as I could to grab a fresh shirt from the drawers. Then I pulled on my boots and crept down the stairs. I could hear my dad's snores from his bed as I passed it. Somehow that sound was comforting.

I hesitated at the backdoor. I almost didn't want to leave him there, all alone in the morning wondering where I had vanished to. It seemed that was our whole relationship now. Wondering about each other, that is. As if we were strangers to one another.

I wonder if he ever thought of the same things.

Sighing, I made my decision. The door opened without a sound and I set out. The sunlight blinded me momentarily until I was able to stumble into the shadows of the forest. Yet the shadows made me nervous again so I hurried towards the cove without any more hesitation.

It was a beautiful day. Despite the slight chill in the air and the frost on the topmost coniferous needles, the sun shone with pure golden light through the trees. Those that actually managed to grow leaves were going from green to yellow. In a week or two I knew they would be crumpling to the ground in dead browns, covered by the first layers of snow.

I shivered, trying not to think of snow. Knowing that Toothless's presence alone would help to calm me, I quickly trekked to the cove and slipped in.

Berk: Open Skies (Toothless's POV)

Seeing Hiccup like this wasn't comforting. This was the second time now, and I feared I would see more of it in the future.

This time it was both better and worse. Better because the soul bond wasn't affected in any way. Due to its new strength, however, I was able to sense immediately that something was wrong. It was only this that helped me reach him.

That was the worse. He was worse. Just from what I could feel Hiccup was distraught, fearful, untrusting. The first thing he did was say "Oh gods" and cry. I let him hold me until he was done. Then he grabbed the saddle. We didn't need words to understand what he needed.

The skies were more turbulent than the day before. I was struggling

to stay stabilized, a combined effect of the winds and Hiccup's disconnection to the activity. The last two times we'd flown there was a perfect synchronization in our movements. This time there was more discord, less correlation. Somehow I knew this wasn't part of the bond.

_Pull up! _I practically shouted as a particularly nasty gale buffeted us. _My wings can't take this force!_

It took way too long for Hiccup's reaction. By the time I heard the click and felt my body rise I could barely stay streamline. So I took the liberty of slapping him in the face.

That more or less did the trick.

"Ow!"

Wake up! You could easily kill us with your carelessness.

He didn't reply. I sighed.

_Honestly Hiccup, I'm worried. You haven't spoken a word, and your emotions are enough to sink us. Please tell me what's wrong. I promise I'll listen. _When he still refused to speak (and I knew he refused; I could sense his hesitation) I continued, _I know it was a nightmare. It's not just a silly thing. There are darker forces in this world, forces I don't even understand that could be affecting you._

Nothing, then:

"Okay. Let's land somewhere."

Somewhere ended up being on top of the large rock tunnel we'd flown through two days before. It was a relaxing place, quiet aside from the calling of the gulls and the mild crash of the ocean against the stone. A warm breeze from the south tickled the long grass into a swaying field of green. The few trees that did grow there teetered over the edge dangerously.

Hiccup chose one of the most dangerous trees of all to sit against until I called him suicidal and forced him into the center of the grass. He went there grudgingly, calling me an old house wife (whatever that was). I lay down so I was facing his head. Hiccup was on his back, looking up at the blue sky and puffy clouds. All was quiet except for the sounds of life and nature.

Speak your mind Hiccup.

"You were right, you know," he said finally, "about the nightmare. It couldn't've been natural."

I stayed silent to let him continue.

"I don't understand why I was so scared. It was just as abstract and meaningless as the first dream. But it was different this time becauseâ€¦|somehow, I knew where I was. Last time I was falling through space with no beginning or end. This time, though, it was a land where there were no seasons. Only winter."

What kind of winter.

"The true kind. The purest and coldest. The one that makes warmth seem like a distant, happy memory."

Go on.

"That wasn't all, though. There were these voices. Actually, it was more like one voice and two animals."

What animals?

"The howling of a wolf and the hissing of a snake." Hiccup stopped talking. He was shaking now, eyes closed before opening up to see the world again. "And there was the voice of a woman. She told me she'd already answered my question, but I didn't understand the answer. I didn't even know what my question was!"

I didn't say anything. What could I? Here I was listening to a dream that could only be the work of witchcraft, yet there was no explanation to it.

"There was something elseâ€¦"

Oh?

"Jack. He was in my dream, exceptâ€¦it wasn't him. He looked different. His hair was black and his skin was grey. And his eyes, they were glowing amber. He wasn't the kind Jack I've gotten to know in the last couple of days."

The same pallor as the Dark One. The one who I dared not say his name. But for Hiccup, I would.

I think you should tell Jack about this dream.

Hiccup sat up and looked at me. "You think so?"

Yes. He seems to know about the dreams more than I do. Perhaps you could tell him about what you saw and he could tell you the source. A Pitch Black, right?

"I think he mentioned that name. It was the man who killed the Sandmanâ€¦"

If this man is the cause of your nightmares, maybe Jack can help.

"Maybeâ€¦"

Hiccup stood up and stretched. "Guess we should head out before it gets too late, eh bud?"

I smiled. How lucky I was to have an optimist for a rider. He hopped on and we took off, much more in sync thanks to the lack of distractions on his mind.

_There was something I wanted to try, _I told him. _If it works, you may be able to see the invisible people Jack spoke of._

"Really? Can we try it now?"

He sounded excited. Too excited.

When we land. It could be too much for your puny human mind to take in. You may have damage to your mind after it.

"Gee, thanks for that ray of sunshine."

I'm being serious! It could seriously hurt you.

"So could flying, talking to you, and living a double life, but we've manage to get through that well enough," he deadpanned. "Look bud, I'm willing to take the risks. Okay?"

I sighed, knowing I probably shouldn't have brought it up. Too late now. _Fine. But if you end up crippled, I told you so._

"Yeah yeah, I got it."

We laughed and I took a dive. Hiccup angled me out and did a few aerial maneuvers that seemed to just happen overnight. It was obvious we were beginning to fly together again. And we were having way too much fun doing so.

North of Berk: Aurora Borealis (Jack's POV)

"Augh!" I groaned at the sky.

Bunny glanced up at me in the sails for a moment before going back to polishing his boomerang. Which I knew didn't need polishing considering he'd done that yesterday.

"Something wrong, mate?"

"I'm bored!" I moaned.

Bunny chuckled. "Sucks to be you then."

Tooth, who was next to me, patted my shoulder sympathetically.

"I've never been bored in my life!" I complained while floating headfirst down the mast. "I've heard many a rumor about this strange mystery known as 'boredom', but I never thought it was this bad. It's horrible! It's like the world decided to die around you."

I didn't get any reply except for the quiet squeaking of the polish on wood. Sighing, I hovered above the deck so my hair brushed against it. Then I landed on my head with a quiet thunk and fell onto my face.

"There's nothing to do," I mumbled into the deck.

Now it was Bunny's turn to sigh as he set down his work and headed over to me. When his feet (paws?) stopped at my face, I turned my head sideways to look up at him.

"I'm sure it's not that bad," he said. "We've been on this ship for a good two weeks. You weren't bored a single day of that, were you?"

"Well, no."

He nodded. "Then I don't know what's to be so bored of now."

"You know Kangaroo, I want to remind you that all of us on this ship are ship bound. Ship. Bound. Meaning we can't leave even if we want to."

"I'm aware of that."

I turned back to glare at the deck. My voice was muffled by the floor below me. "I left the ship almost every day after Manny said I could. Now I can't leave and it's frustrating."

I heard more footsteps. North's. I rolled onto my side and looked at him. "Please tell me why we're not allowed to leave."

"It is too dangerous."

"And I'm a thrill seeker," I deadpanned. "Give me a better reason."

Tooth fluttered down. Her bare feet skimmed the deck near me. "Think about it Jack. We don't know where Pitch is. Until we know where he is and what he's planning we have to be cautious. Besides, if you leave we lose all connections with Hiccup. He still can't see us, after all."

She had a point; a really good point. I didn't want to admit it. But I did.

"I know. But that doesn't make me want to leave."

"We all want to get off of ship and explore land, Jack. But it is too dangerous. Understand this."

"I do North, truly I do. But I'll have to leave eventually and you all know it," I grumbled. "I have to go further north to start winter. That's the only place where there's still weather cold enough to make it all happen."

"But do you have to leave right away?" asked North.

I hesitated before replying grudgingly, "Well, no."

"Then there is no problem with you waiting!"

I groaned and sat up. "But I'm so boooored! How do I cure boredom?"

Bunny rolled his eyes. "By the Moon, I dunno. Just go to sleep or something!"

"That's boring too! Besides, it's not like I'll be having any good dreams if I do."

We fell silent for a moment, thinking about something we hadn't in a long time. I changed the subject quickly.

"Well, we know some things about Pitch. Apparently he's stealing children from Berk using the dragons he has in control. He's forged an alliance with something around this island, and from what Hiccup says there is some sort of nest north of here. I could try to find it."

North shook his head. "Again, too dangerous. How about we wait another day, then we take turns in pairs to look around. Use smaller boats or the sleigh."

It was the closest thing I would get to a compromise, so I agreed. It was then that I heard the beating of wings. Which could only mean one of two things. One: we were being attacked (which I wouldn't have minded in that moment; what, I was that bored!) or two: Hiccup was here.

I was hoping for the later, by the by.

And I was right. Seconds later there was a familiar boy upon a familiar dragon landing on the deck. I smiled and glided over.

"Good to see ya, Hic!"

"Hic?" he asked incredulously. "Really?"

I nodded thoughtfully. "You're right. That sounds even lamer than Hiccup. How about 'Cup, then?"

That got a real laugh out of him. "Naw, Hic's fine!"

Hiccup laughed a bit until he noticed Toothless staring at him. "What?"

The dragon must've said something, because Hiccup rolled his eyes and said, "Well gee, thanks."

"What'd he say?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing. Just that I obviously didn't like his company as much as your's considering how happy I got the moment I got on this ship."

"Yep," I said. "The ship full of invisible people."

"About that," Hiccup interrupted. "Toothless told me there's a way I might be able to see them."

That got everyone's attention. "Oh?"

"Yeah. He said it could damage my brain, but I'm willing to give it a shot."

"That sounds dangerous."

"Didn't you know? Danger's my middle name!"

"Sure it is," I said sarcastically. Hiccup pouted a bit.

"Can I at least try?"

"Up to you."

He turned to Toothless. "Okay bud, what do I have to do."

Toothless responded (as silent to me as always) and Hiccup leaned down until their heads touched. His eyes closed as he began to "I assume" repeat the instructions given to him.

"Close eyes, breath deep. Empty the mind. Search for the bond and concentrate on your words."

And then he let out a pained cry and collapsed on the deck. I immediately jumped up in panic.

"What in the moon just happened?"

Toothless gave me a sorta hopeless look. And he looked terrified on top of that.

I knelt down beside Hiccup. The others had all gathered to.

"Give him some space!" commanded Bunny. "He's still breathing, so he's alive at least."

"At least," I mused.

Tooth looked worried, but less so than I did. "It looks like he just fainted. We should sit back and wait for him to wake up on his own accord."

"You sure?" I asked.

"I agree with her," Bunny said.

"Seconded," confirmed North.

I sighed. "If you insist."

So we all sat down around the deck. I kept an especially close eye on Hiccup. Toothless refused to leave his side, so we left him like that.

Five minutes passed. Then ten. When the clock crept closer to fifteen I got worried until I heard a small sound escape him. I thought it was my imagination until I saw Hiccup's head turn slightly and his eyelids flicker.

"He's awake!"

North of Berk: The Ship (Hiccup's POV)

I heard a din of voices rushing at my ears with each off-beat of my heart, but chose to ignore them all. All I focused on was the pounding of my head. Which probably wasn't the best thing to concentrate of. I tried to open my eyes, but failed once. So I tried again. And again. And again. When my eyes finally did flicker open, all I noticed was the headache. I tried to sit up, only to find my head too heavy to lift. My eyes closed and I groaned.

"He's awake!" I heard a voice shout. Jack.

"Oh gods. What happened?"

_You passed out. For a good while too. _A sigh. _I told you it wasn't a good idea to try and attempt a sharing of minds._

"Toothless?"

The very same.

I blinked as my sight focused on Toothless. His green eyes shone with concern as he gazed down at me. I raised a hand to his snout. "Hey bud."

I could feel his laughter. _I was afraid I killed you and all you can say to that is 'Hey bud'?_

"What can I say? I'm not afraid of death."

I figured you'd say something human like that.

I chuckled a bit. Jack came over with a gust of cold wind which forced my eyes shut again.

"Hey Jack."

"Hey yourself." He laughed. "Geez, we were all worried when you came in here so frantically only to faint dead away. Pretty dramatic."

"Haven't you heard? Dramatic's my middle name," I joked.

"I thought it was Danger. Or was it Horrendous?"

I sighed. "Don't remind me."

"Hey, Hiccup Horrendous has a better ring to it than Hiccup Dramatic."

"Okay," I admitted, "you've got a point there."

As Jack laughed, I rubbed my eyes clear of the dirt that had managed to get in them. My head was still pounding but it wasn't as bad as before. I was capable of sitting up again. As I was finally able to keep my eyes open, I noticed something.

"Um, Jack?"

He stopped laughing, though the grin didn't leave his face. "Yeah?"

"I think I'm hallucinatingâ€¦"

"Oh? Don't tell me you hit your head that badly!"

"No, it's justâ€¦this might sound really crazy to you, but there's a giant grey rabbit behind you."

"Of course there is! It's just Bunny!"

And then the magnitude of my words hit him. He looked more shocked than I felt. So did the giant grey rabbit. Jack turned to face the creature.

"He sees you."

"He sees me."

"E. Aster Bunnymund," I murmured, recognizing him from the painting in the room below decks. "So that's one of the Guardians?"

Bunnymund looked directly at me. "Seems so, mate. Unless you see another Easter Bunny around here."

I nodded. It was after that shock that I turned to Toothless. "Was this you?"

_I told you this would happen if it worked. Which it seems to have.
_There was a slight smugness to his voice.

I finally stood up (with Toothless's help) and stared at my surroundings. And all the new people there.

"Woahâ€¦"

* * *

><p>Guys, I'll admit I was feeling uninspired to write this chapter and I'm feeling slightly uninspired to write the next chapter at the time being. Updates will probably become more infrequent because of school (my schedule is basically all AP and post-secondary classes). I'm sorry for that.

Thanks to everyone who has reviewed so far; you guys keep me going. Seriously, thank you. I've gotten so much great feedback and I sincerely appreciate the support.

I promise I won't be giving up on this story. No matter how long it takes, I'll see it through until the end.

That's that.

-Sushi (because I'll still sign off as Sushi)

15. Making Acquaintances

Hi, I'm back! Thank you all so much for your patience. Trust me, I've wanted the time to sit down and get all these ideas out of my head and onto paper too, but life sometimes bites you in the backside and laughs at your contorted face of pain. And of course, thank you to everyone who reviewed since last time; it was nice to see all your supportive words. :)

_Well, I finally - __**finally**__ - got my own laptop, so no more "oh no, there's nowhere to type" dilemma! As for high schoolâ€¦it's been a stresser, but I wanted to get this chapter up. Because finally â€œ __**finally**__ â€œ we get to North's past. Enjoy!_

* * *

><p>15 " Making Acquaintances

* * *

><p>North of Berk: The Ship (Hiccup's POV)

I was still in shock from staring at all the people suddenly on the previously abandoned deck that I didn't know how to react. I just stood there and stared with my mouth hanging wide open. Fortunately, Jack beat me to the words.

"Well then!" Jack started, gliding over to E. Aster Bunnymund. "I see you already recognized Bunny."

"Good to meet ya," he said with a small wave. I waved back weakly.

"And that's Toothiana," Jack continued.

He was pointing to a woman wearing a dress made of shining fabric that rippled like water; I'd never seen anything like it before. She has short blond-to-brown hair that framed her slender face. Her bangs seemed to hover right over her large, violet eyes. Light freckles sprinkled over her nose. She was beautiful, but I was too distracted by the pair of wings sprouting from her back. They resembled those of a dragonfly, but the shape was more avian than anything. There were five on each side. The light glinted through them, making patterns of purples, pinks, and greens swirl on the deck.

Her wings seemed to vanish with a faint hum as she took off and flew towards me. Toothiana grabbed my hand (which was slack at my side) and began to shake it vigorously, a sparkling white smile plastered on her face. I stumbled back in shock, now seeing I could actually stand on my own again without Toothless to lean on.

"Oh, hi Hiccup. I'm Toothiana, but just about everyone calls me Tooth. It's so wonderful to finally have you see me! I mean, I've seen you when you've come to visit Jack, but now we can actually talk. Oh, I'm so excited!"

Her words all came in a blur that made it hard to decipher. I laughed weakly and gave her a crooked grin.

That probably wasn't the smartest move.

Tooth immediately perked and fluttered straight to my face. "Hiccup, can you smile again."

I did.

"No no, so I can see all of your teeth."

I grinned larger, making a long eeee sound.

Her fingers were in my mouth in a flash, pulling my lips and cheeks away so she could observe. And she didn't stop speaking all the while.

"Oh, wow. I'm actually really impressed. I know your people don't have floss, and I have seen the effects of that mind you, but your teeth are surprisingly clean. Tell me, do Viking brush their teeth?"

"Bwufh?"

"Guess not. But oh, not a single cavity! Not much sugar in your diet, I suppose. And they are pretty white. A bit crooked, but some people find that endearing. I know I've seen too many people straightening their teeth down south. Or replacing them with those awful venires! But I see you haven't!"

"Bweneerz?"

"You wouldn't know what they are, I'm sure. They only exist down where we're from, further south. They're basically fake teeth people put in to make their smi-"

"Tooth," a man I assumed was North said quietly, patting her on the shoulder. "I think you've given Hiccup quite enough shock in one moment."

"Oh!" She pulled away and blushed slightly. She followed with a dazzling smile and a meek shrug. "Sorry. I was pretty impressed by what I saw."

I waved it away. "That's okay. Jack told me you could get pretty enthusiastic about teeth."

"I don't think you're emphasizing it enough," Jack mumbled for only me to hear. I did my best not to laugh. Then I turned to the man.

"I'm going to assume you're Nikolas St. North, right?"

"Yes!" said the man. "But please call me North. I have not been called Nikolas for many years."

"Okayâ€¦North."

"Jack didn't tell you about me?" North asked.

I shook my head. "No, he didn't. He told me about all the other Guardians, though. Well, he kinda told me about your job during your holiday, but not much else. When I asked about your past, he told me it wouldn't be the same if he told it to me. He said, and I quote, 'You'll lose all the magic of the story if North doesn't tell it to you!'"

I swore I saw his eyes twinkle. The older man patted me on the shoulder.

"Then Jack knows how to flatter."

North seemed very friendly. I just hadn't expected him to be soâ€¦big. He reminded me a lot of my dad when it came to height and build. North even had a beard, though his was white rather than red. The only difference, it seemed, was the personality of the people in question. Dad tried, but he sometimes seemed too cold and

unapproachable about practically anything. But North was different. Just a few moment with him and I already felt welcome in his presence. He seemed kind, and in a genuine way.

I felt a nudge on my hand. Looking down, my eyes met with Toothless's. He was looking pretty smug, but there was obviously something shy about the way he met my eyes.

"Hey bud."

_Well? _Toothless asked me. _Are you adjusting to this whole seeing everyone?_

"Surprisingly yes," I murmured. "Thank you."

I'm just glad I didn't kill you.

"Wow, aren't you an optimist."

Hmm, I detect sarcasm. Now where could that have come from?

Okay thenâ€¦looks like Toothless was beginning to pick up my snide attitude. I probably should tone that down a bit.

Just then I heard the door leading below decks creak open. Looking over North's shoulder - actually, more like trying, then giving up and looking passed him - I saw a large, furry something emerge from. I gave a surprised shout and sprang back, tripping over Toothless's tail.

"What is that?"

"We call it Phil," Jack joked, floating over to me.

I pointed (yeah yeah, rude of me, I know; Toothless gave me plenty of sass for that). "Is that 'Phil' a yeti?"

The other gave me an incredulous look. "You seriously don't know what a yeti looked like?"

"You told me they cook!" I gasped.

"They do cook. More so Henrietta and Gerard than anyone, but you get the idea."

"Oh." I pulled my eyes away from Phil and lowered my finger. "I though he was a troll of some sort."

The indignant sounds that came out of Phil made me feel extremely sorry for what I just said. Jack's laughter was even louder, as well as North's and Bunny's. Tooth look at me with a reassuring smile.

"Phil'll forgive you," she told me. "We all understand you didn't know what he was. Funny you called him a troll though. Yetis and trolls have been on bad terms for a number of years now. Apparently there's some feud over which is more believed in."

"Do you know?" I asked.

Toothiana shook her head. "Depends on who you ask, I suppose."

"How many of those furry things - I'm sorry, yetis - are there on this ship?"

"The yetis? Six." Bunny hopped over and began listing off with his paw. "Phil, of course. then there's Gerard and Henrietta. They're married and run the kitchens. Maddie does most of the cleaning, which she's agreed to so it's not like we're forcing her into manual labor or anything. Then there's Robb who does all the technical things, and Andy. He's just here, I guess. I bet Phil convinced North to have him on board since they're best friends."

I nodded, taking it all in. And then I noticed one last piece of the puzzle. "Um, Jack?"

"Yeah Hic?"

I pointed to his shoulder. "Who's that there?"

"Oh! I almost forgot about her!"

The winter spirit smiled and cupped his hands around the delicate little creature before holding her out to me. I leaned in and met its violet eyes. The little creature resembled a bird - a long, beak-like nose and a feathery body - but had the same wings as Toothiana. "Is that a tooth fairy?"

"Yep! She's another 'baby tooth.' I call her Baby for short. She's close to Tooth, of course, but I saved her during a scuffle with Pitch and she's been around me ever since."

Baby did a little curtsy, to which I bowed, before fluttering back into Jack's hood.

Jack clasped his hands together. "Right! Now that we got past all of the introductions, mind telling me why you came? Not that I hate your company or anything."

I froze for a second, remembering exactly why I had come to the ship. "Right about that"

Jack frowned. "Hiccup, are you okay?"

"Sort of."

I laughed nervously at Jack's expression.

"The truth is - gods, this sounds lame - I had a dream. A really bad dream."

"A bad dream?" asked North. "How bad of a dream?"

"Well, that's the part that's hard to explain"

_Hiccup, _Toothless warned. _You're stalling._

"No I'm not!"

Then say it.

"You tell them if it's so easy for you," I muttered.

I would if I could, but alas I can't. This is all up to you Hiccup. Besides, I think you should tell them.

"But what if I don't want to tell them?"

"Tell us what?" asked Jack.

"I had a nightmare and Toothless told me it would probably be a good idea to talk to Jack about it," I blurted out.

Everyone was silent, then:

"What?"

I breathed slowly. "I said, 'I had a nightmare and Toothless told me it would probably be a good idea to talk to Jack about it.' Because you mentioned a person named Pitch Black when you told me about Sandy." I turned so I was now addressing Jack directly. "Toothless knows a bit about him, I think, but he thought you would be the right person to talk to about this."

Jack's face was impassive, but I could sense some fury in his eyes. "Go on."

"It may take a while."

"We're all ears, mate," said Bunny casually. "If this is really Pitch, any information you can give us is good information."

I looked around the deck at all the friendly eyes and nodded. "This isn't the first time I've had a dream like this. All I know is that they couldn't have been natural. This first one affected the bond I had with Toothlessâ€|"

.

I wasn't sure how much time had passed when I stopped talking, but it was getting later and my throat was dry from speaking. This wasn't as bad as when I told Toothless about the dreams the first time. No one interrupted me; they just sat in stony silence that was more than uncomfortable.

Some time during my storytelling all the other yetis joined Phil on the deck, followed by a few odd-looking cones with drooping bells hanging from their tips; not to mention they had big eyes and even bigger smiles. Jack calmly explained to me that they were elves.

Once I was done, I looked up. "Ta-da."

Absolutely no replies.

"Is this something I should be concerned about?"

Again, no one broke the silence. I looked over to Toothless, who merely shook his head as if to say he had no idea how to react

either.

"Hiccup." I looked up to where North was standing (everyone had taken a seat while I passed around and spoke), glad someone had finally broken the stifling silence. He smiled at me. "Why don't you come with me for a bit. I could explain some things that may help you understand all this."

With that he headed towards the stern of the ship.

I turned to where the winter spirit was hovering. He gave me an encouraging nudge on the shoulder. "Go on. North'll probably be able to tell you a bit more about stuff."

"What kind of stuff?"

Jack shrugged. "I dunno. General stuff, I guess."

"Well that was insightful," I murmured. Toothless snorted a bit.

"If you'd like," North added.

I couldn't help but smile a bit. "Sure, I'd like that. I mean, if you're okay with it."

"But of course! Come!" He patted me heartily on the back (right where Snotlout bruised it, so I tried not to wince too obviously) with a laugh that could only be considered jolly. "I will show you things you may not know of. And tell you about myself too. In here."

North lead me to the place I had explored the first day, the captain's cabin. This time, he opened the door for me. I followed, giving Jack an anxious smile before the heavy wooden door shut behind me.

Aurora Borealis (Jack's POV)

As soon as Hiccup departed with North, I began to pace angrily.

"Bucco, calm down," commanded Bunny.

"It has to be Pitch," I retaliated. "No one else could possibly cause nightmares that horrific. The question is why. Why? What's so special about Hiccup that it requires him to be targeted directly?"

Bunny didn't say anything. So I continued.

"I mean, he's cool and all, being different from all the other Vikings according to him, but that can't be the reason."

"Unless - and I hate to suggest this - Hiccup's allied to Pitch."

"Impossible!"

"But it's possible. You have to admit it, Jack. Not any person can shoot a powerful black dragon out of the sky like he claims he did."

"Could it be Toothless?" Tooth asked.

We turned to her. Including Toothless. "What do you mean by that, Tooth?"

"The dragonâ€¦Hiccup sticks out because he has one. No one else in Berk's ever tamed a dragon before. Maybe that's something that caught Pitch's attention. Maybe he has spies in and around Berk. The stolen children, the dragons under Pitch's controlâ€¦it could be that Hiccup has something Pitch doesn't. The ability to control dragons!"

"That could be!"

"Or," interjected Bunny, "this could be a sign that he is a stolen child."

"You were saying something about spies," I said to Tooth, ignoring the pooka.

Toothiana perked. "Yes, I did. It makes sense, though, wouldn't it? Pitch has Nightmares in his control. As long as they're shadows, he can be there. If he's hanging in, near, or around Berk, he could easily know what goes on there. A lot better than us, for sure."

I nodded and began pacing again. "So in other words, the only way we'll be able to find Pitch is if we go looking for him. In Berk. Great! When can we start!"

"Not now, that's for sure," muttered Bunny.

That didn't sit well with me. "But we have to do something!"

"And what can we do? Hm? Think about it mate. We're shipbound. You were just blathering about it a moment ago. That means we can't leave for any circumstance. The only reason you're allowed out at any point is because your primary purpose of coming to Berk was to start winter. And that's all you're allowed to do. Got it?"

"But-"

"But nothing!" Bunny sighed. "Look, I get that Hiccup's well-being is really important to you. It's important to all of us. But the fact of the matter is that there's not a high chance that we can defeat Pitch with the situation we're in. There's no magic here, and even though Hiccup can see us now it's not enough to have any notable power. Everything we have left is put into our defenses until we know exactly what's going on. Can you understand that?"

"I don't want a lecture," I whined.

"Then I'll take that as a yes."

"â€¦yeah."

"Good. Now go do whatever it was you were doing."

I couldn't help but smile. "The complaining about boredom part, or the getting mad at Pitch part?"

"Oh for the love of-Tooth! Do something about him! Please!"

Tooth seemed more than delighted to try and appease my boredom by inviting me down to the kitchens. I knew Gerard and Henrietta were going to be there soon to make lunch. Her suggestion: help them. My thoughts: how did I not think of going down to the kitchens to mess around sooner?!

The two were down there all right, making what I assumed would be lunch. Steam rose from the stove and floated lazily out of the open pothole window. I floated over and took a peek into the giant wok Henrietta had just turned her back to.

"Stir fry and rice?" I asked, sticking my index finger and thumb into the pan to retrieve a morsel of chicken, only to have it slapped away by Henrietta's spatula. "Ow! Okay, sorry. Just wondering what was in it. I smell chicken. Is that zucchini?"

She nodded. We were getting somewhere.

"Something yellow, string beans, mushrooms, water chestnuts and bamboo shoots? Where did you get your hands on those? They must've cost a fortune on the market!"

Henrietta ignored me. I turned to the other yeti. Gerard shrugged and went back to humming some tuneless song while mixing some soup. Egg drop, I guess by the smell. I floated up to the ceiling to check. Yep, egg drop.

Propping my staff behind my head, I watched the yetis work from my laying position flat against the wooden beams. The two were going back and forth like some intricate dance, adding and tasting, half-bickering the entire time. I grinned. Seems I wasn't needed to cause slight discord.

Though I did play my part.

No worries! I only froze the gas in the burners (while promptly freezing the food) before flying out like a demon was hot on my trail. Laughing the whole while too.

Looks like I found something to occupy my boredom for at least a little while.

North of Berk: The Ship (Toothless's POV)

I sat in silence and listened to the whole conversation the other Guardians were having. So it seemed they knew who the Dark One was as well, and much more than I did. This both gladdened me and worried me. Gladdened because I knew Hiccup was safe with them. Worried because sooner or later he would have to learn the truth. Instead of dwelling on that cumbersome thought, I turned and walked over to where my friend was.

_Toothless, _Roxy greeted me. _You are well, I presume?_

I bowed my head slightly._ Indeed. I must inquire about the same. How are you?_

She flapped her wings experimentally; I could sense her inner smile. _I am healing well. It seems I will be able to fly again within a few

suns._

_That is good to hear. _I sat down beside the Gronkle and watched her carefully.

_You have a question. _She wasn't asking.

_The block you mentioned - the one in Hiccup's mind-

Is still present. It seems this mark will not leave him easily.

I nodded and lay. _I was hoping it was just his ignorance to the other members of the ship that was causing it._

It is something much deeper than that, as though he suffered a great hurt he masks.

But what could that be?

Roxy sighed. _Alas, I do not know. Perhaps only time can tell._

Could it be the power of the Dark One?

I doubt it. This block is an old one for such a young human - at least fifty moons in the making. Unless he was targeting you rider before now, I cannot see how he is involved.

Her logic was solid. I agreed. _I can't see the Dark One having any interest in Hiccup before the soul bond as it is._

Indeed.

Do you thinkâ€¦do you think our soul bond would help? The block, I mean.

Maybe. And then again, maybe not. This is a powerful thing of a human mind. Only those with one can find a way in. Or so I sense.

_I feel impatient, _I admitted. _It is not easy to wait for fate to find Hiccup and show him the way. I wish there were a way I could._

Only time and patience can tell. You shall have to let Hiccup find his way first, before you can lead. And there is something in your mind that I sense. Something that is not quite normal.

I felt concern at her words. _How do you mean?_

Your body is old, as well as your memories, but your heart is still young. Far younger than mine, though I do not have the moons as you do. And despite this, there are things your old mind has hidden away from you as well. Both you and your rider have things you have blocked away. In many ways your mind is more human than mine.

Do you suggest I am not whole?

Not at all. You are justâ€¦curious, Toothless. I do not know what to think of you.

Roxy hesitated. I leaned forward, eyes never leaving her.

_Tell me what is on _your_ mind, _I said.

The time I knew you from the nestâ€|it is almost like I speak to a different dragon today. We all found you cold, unapproachable, as though you didn't want or need company. You were the only dragon of black there. That, and you followed the Queen's bidding like no other. As if it were your purpose.

This confused me. _Was this not how everyone felt?_

Pardon me for sounding rude.

_Pardoned. But please, was this not how you felt there? As though it was a duty to serve both she and her ally? _I hesitated. _As if you wanted to serve him?_

The Dark One.

Yes.

Roxy didn't answer for a long spell. My concern was beginning to peak. Before I had a chance to ask, she replied.

None of us ever felt that way. We always longed for freedom.

I wasn't sure what I felt in that moment, but it definitely wasn't a good feeling.

_When we were under the Queen's control, we did not want to serve her. We did because that was her control over us, but we were never happy about it. When her alliance with the Dark One strengthened, as it has since the beginning of our child-taking raids, we fell more and more drawn to her like a terrible ailment of some sort. And any moment away from her was under the control of the Dark One. He sent us all dreams that made us so terrified of their combined wrath that we couldn't flee from the thoughts. _Roxy noticed my silence. _Does something discomfort you, Toothless?_

I shook my head.

She obviously could tell I was lying. _You do know I sense you are conflicted._

_It's just that when I was there, at the Nest, I never had those experiences. Never. I never felt like I was being used against my will, or held a prisoner without my consent. None of that. _I blinked at the realization. _I was never afraid or hateful to the Dark One. I didn't feel that way about the two of them until I was out of their sphere of influence. I felt that way about themâ€|after I met Hiccup. That was the first time I'd ever experienced anything. But I remember fear. I was afraid to die. And now I am afraid to go back to the Nest. It is a strange thing for me to feel._

_You were always the essence of fear, _Roxy stated. _Perhaps it was your job not to feel such feelings._

_Perhaps. _But we both knew neither of us believed those

words.

There was something different about me, and I didn't know what. And I decided if I had to share it with someone else, it would begin with her. I would've told Hiccup first, but I was not comfortable with him knowing just how large a scale there was in this world.

Roxyâ€|

Yes, Toothless?

May I tell you something of grave importance to me?

_Why of course! _She leaned forward, but not in an overly eager fashion. It was like a mother leaning forward to hear what her child had to say. Something about it was unnerving. _Speak your mind._

_When we were still back at the Nest, before I was set free by Hiccup, I used to be content with the life I had. Never had I been afraid or hurt or craving freedom. Yet after I met Hiccup, that all changed. The first day after he freed me, I was trying desperately to get back. To escape the fact I couldn't fly and just go back and do _his_ bidding. Then Hiccup came. I looked down upon him with such content that even I cannot describe anymore. But I did. And despite all that he still came back to speak to me and only me. He made the soul bond unconsciously, if ever that is possible._

I stopped. _I'm sorry. You already know all of this from sharing minds._

It is pardoned. Sometimes it helps to speak ones mind to relieve ones soul.

Her words were comforting. I relaxed a bit and continued. _The more I got to know Hiccup, the more I began to see the world around me. It's as if he's the reason why I can smile, or laugh, or play, or fly, or do anything that isn't a designated duty. I don't have someone telling me what to do and when to do it and just how to do it either. And I feelâ€|I'm not so sure how to describe it. I feel like I could see the world for what it was worth for the first time. It almost feels likeâ€|it's as thoughâ€|I think..._

'Go on,' her eyes said, so I did.

I think it almost feels like I didn't know the idea of freedom. As if I wasn't made to be a free creature. As though I didn't know I could be independent. Until then.

We were silent for long moments. After that, Roxy finally responded.

_That is a troubling thought, _was all she said.

You don't say!

_You sounded very human in that moment, _Roxy commented mildly. _No dragon would ever say things soâ€|mockingly._

I stopped for a moment, thinking about her words before feeling a laugh myself. _It must be something I picked up from Hiccup. He is quite sarcastic. We dragons are more straightforward about everything we say, but humansâ€|they are truly intricate. Intriguing. I find I learn more about them through Hiccup than he learns about dragons from me. Not that he would agree with that statement._

You two disagree?

_Constantly. _I rolled my eyes the way I'd seen Hiccup do on multiple occasions when using that tone. _You would think a soul bond stops that, but no. We bicker. We call each other names. He's aggravating at best. I'm sure he'd say the same thing._

You have an interesting relationship.

_Yeah, no kidding. _I sighed and stood, stretching. _I've noticed some changes about myself since the soul bond was formed._

Indeed?

I've been more tired during the night. I actually fall asleep when the sun sets.

You are a solely nocturnal creature, are you not?

_I was. _The words hung there, so I continued. _I began to shed again. It's rare as it is, but it's become more and more excessive. I've begun to grow, I think, but I wouldn't know because I have no memories of growing up._

_Surely you have at least some memories? _Roxy interrupted. _At least one of your family? Or perhaps of other Night Furies._

That's the thing. I don't have a single recollection of anything before meeting the Dark One.

Not even one?

Not even.

She sighed. _You must have been very lonely._

_I didn't feel loneliness. I didn't feel anything but hatred to humans. I couldn't describe it then, and I certainly can't do it now, but whatever that brainwash was, it's gone. _I smiled. _That must've been another thing this soul bond has done._

I am happy for you.

As I am for you as well. Thank you.

Roxy stood up and stretched before swallowing a few rocks I had not noticed from earlier. _Ever since Hiccup first came, he mentioned to Jack that we Gronckles swallow stone. Phil - my yeti guardian - went to the shore yesterday in a rowboat and returned with some variety. They are quite tasty. Not that humans would know._

_Well, _I said, _they could always learn._

Do you think there will be peace, then?

Maybe. Probably not. Either way, I want humans to be able to accept Hiccup and his choice when he became one with me. It is not an easy thing. I just hope someday it may. That is my dream.

And a good dream it is. If this is any condolence to you, I shall also strive for this dream as well.

I smiled. _All it requires is someone who is willing to stand up to authority._

_Like Hiccup? _asked Roxy.

Exactly like him.

Aurora Borealis: Captain's Quarters (Hiccup's POV)

"Have a seat, Hiccup."

I looked around the quarters. "Is the bed okay?"

"Bed is fine." North picked up a plate from the table and offered it to me. "Cookies?"

I didn't know what exactly a cookie was, but they looked good so I accepted some and began to munch away. They were soft, with pieces of dark bittersweet something embedded in them that was really tasty. My stomach growled and I hastily took another few in my hand. The big man chuckled, but said nothing.

I sat and waited, gnawing away at the snack. North was at the large bookshelf by the workbench I'd noticed the first time I had discovered the ship. He was checking each of the spines slowly; there was writing on them that he was browsing while humming under his breath. Finding whatever it was that he was looking for North let out a happy exclamation and pulled out a particularly large volume.

"Here we are!"

I couldn't help but lean forward when North brought over the book. It was different than the one I had seen on the first day; this one's cover was more worn and a dark brown color rather than the flashy red. The symbols - letters, I mean - on the cover were unrecognizable to me.

I pointed directly to them, swallowing the last of the cookie. "What does it say?"

"The title of book?" asked North.

"Yes."

"It reads 'Almanac of World History,' he replied. "It is a book that I have been adding to every year. It was gift to me from Wise Old Owl when I first became Guardian. He said it was because I had the eyes that could see the wonder in the world, what there wasn't but could be! He said to me that I would benefit from having knowledge in me.

So I have kept book since."

"An owl?" I asked incredulously. "Wait, is this the owl Jack told me about when he was explaining Bunny's past?"

"Yes, the very same. He is a very smart owl and a good friend to us all. Except for Jack, but they have yet to meet. You would know his intelligence just from being in his presence, I can guarantee that." North sat down next to me on the bed and set the book across his lap. "I feel you may see the wonder in this book as I did so many years ago."

Though the book didn't look that big in his hands, I knew my arms would barely be long enough to wrap around it, let alone hold it. I gave it a long, hard look.

"'Almanac of World History,'" I murmured under my breath.

North watched me with a smile I could only consider fatherly. "You cannot read these letter, yes? Only runes."

I blushed. "Yeahâ€¦"

"It is not thing to be ashamed of. I could teach you how to read our letters sometime later, if you'd like."

"Really? You would do that for me?"

"Yes! You seem like you would be bright pupil."

I brightened for a moment before sighing. "I wouldn't want to impose. Besides, I've barely got enough time as it is. That, and too many secrets."

North nodded understandingly. "There are many things many people hide for many different reasons. You have much to keep secret for being so young. And now seeing us is a whole new one!"

"It is, isn't it?"

I sat in silence as North opened the book and began to flip through the pages. Though I tried not to, I couldn't help but ask him over and over to stop so I could stare at the illustrations. Maps of lands I had never seen before, color sketches of plants and animals so real they seemed to jump out of the page, colors I didn't even have names for, strange shapes that could only be considered otherworldly. That was everything, and there was more that that even.

Finally, after a lot of pages and a headache from the amount of new information my mind was trying to contain, North stopped. I stared at the new page intently. There was a map of a large place - a country, I recalled - with small, labeled dots all over it. I knew now that the area was much larger than Berk and the surrounding islands.

"This is Roccia," North said after a moment. "My homeland."

"Each dot is a village, right?"

"Not quite. Most of these are cities, about a hundred times larger

than Berk."

"That big?" I stared open-mouthed at the map. "So this is scaled down by a lotâ€¦"

North nodded. "The place I was raised is so small they do not put it on map. But it would be around here, in north-western Siberg, away from the mountains." He pointed on the map to show me. "It was in a village known as Malen'kaya. A tiny place it was, but home nonetheless.

"I was raised by my grandfather in his humble cottage near the forest, a bit away from the rest of the villagers. We didn't have much when I was a child. I was orphan boy, in a sense. Both my parents died when I was very young."

"I'm sorry," I said automatically.

North waived it away. "It is fine. I didn't know my mother, she died of illness when I was baby. My father was lost in blizzard during a hunt and was never found. I was barely four, so most of my memories are with my grandfather. He was a big, strong man who could fell a tree as easily as one can speak. But he taught me that magic was real as long as I believed in it. He told me stories of strange beasts and fey and why the northern lights appear. How they were all linked to a world that was like a shadow to us.

"Many called him a crazy storyteller, but all the children in the village loved him as though he were part of their families. My grandfather was a woodcarver. He would tell us all these stories while he worked and made things from nothing but a block. He taught me everything I know today."

"Jack said you made toys," I interrupted. "Did he teach you those too?"

"Yes, though I have made tweaks over time. The same toys become better, more complex. I go with times to best of my ability."

"So do you consider yourself an inventor, not trying to interrupt of anything."

"You are fine. I do consider myself an inventor to some degree, but mostly a wondered. That is title I have given myself some time ago. Would you like to hear the rest of my story?"

"Yes, of course! Sorry."

North chuckled. "No need to apologize for being curious. It is a gift that seldom gets appreciated.

"In Malen'kaya, I grew up as my grandfather's apprentice. It was a comfortable life, though not the easiest. We had little money and no connections. I knew my grandfather wanted the best for me though, and sent me to Moskva when I was ten to get a better education. We both soon realized that was a terrible idea."

North turned a few pages and showed me a few more pictures. Most of them were of colorful buildings covered in snow, exotic foods, and smiling blond and burnet people.

"This is Moskva. Moskva is very successful city now, but it was crowded and very grey when I was there. Nothing but buildings and people. As much as the new technologies there were enthralling I lost the concepts of imagination and magic there. There is something quite different about growing up in an area with no mountains or trees or stars in the night sky."

"No nature?" I asked, horrified. The only situation I could think like that was my nightmare.

"None at all," replied North with a shake of the head.

"That's horrible!"

"And this was the way city folk grew up with. They were not blessed like I was. So after two years I went home with vows to never leave again. All the other kids thought I was crazy. The city was a land of opportunity, they would tell me. I was lucky to leave. But it was quite the opposite. I lost myself there.

"By the time I was twenty, my grandfather passed away. No need for condolences," he said quickly as I opened my mouth. "He died happy and in the way he had always wanted. He would say to me, 'Nikolai Nikolaiavich, the greatest was to leave this world to the next life is where you're most content. And I will be most content to fall into eternal sleep before my fireplace, with hot soup and warm slippers. Perhaps a blanket or two, and a good book. And my family there to see me off, of course.'

"So my dear grandfather left me like that one winter day. It happened to be the day of Christmas, a day of joy and merriment and celebration, as well as prayers of purity and longevity. I was not as sad as I thought I would be. He was content, and I promised myself I would remember how content he had been."

He beamed at the memory. Though his grandfather's death seemed like a happy one, I couldn't shake away the fact that it wasn't exactly the most notable death of all time. North picked up on me quickly.

"It is belief in Viking culture that only those who die in battle are given a place in the honorable hall of Valhalla."

"Yes! How did you-"

"How I knew?"

I nodded.

"I read about this once upon a time. You may not think my grandfather's death glorious or acceptable, but in our lands there are many more beliefs about the afterlife. People further south pray to many different gods than yours. Some pray to one deity, others to many faceless ones, and some still don't believe in anything after death. It depends on who you talk to."

I blinked. "Wow. I never thought that was possible."

"It is a strange concept. For longest time some of the people who were part of bigger beliefs - religions, we say - tried to force

their beliefs on other people. Many religions died out over time, but there are still many many in our world. But that will be lesson for another time. I feel I should finish my story."

"Of course! Please, I'd love to hear the rest."

"So it was Christmas Day. Christmas is one of the holidays of a religion known as Christianity down south. I will teach you basics someday, but all you need to know for now is that Christmas is a very important day. With his passing I always kept that specific day dear to me.

"There was another tradition that my family on Christmas day. We would all go to church, our house of prayer. In there we were taught how our one God made the world and how He blessed us with out given talents. Though you are supposed to pay attention, I found church to be very boring."

I laughed a bit at that. North did too.

"All they did was read from the Holy Bible - our book - and tell us how to use those words to live a good and honest life. I, however, could never sit through them. I would imagine what was outside the world of humans. What was the afterlife like in Heaven? Could I make a heaven like that?

"These are not normal thoughts, but I found them to be a comfort and went through life deciding that perhaps I could too make a happy world.

"I do not claim my life overly interesting. As I grew older, I slowly began to do many other things, such as ice sculptures and little toys. I began to do odd jobs to earn a living, as I was not quite skilled enough to make much from woodwork in small village. No one buys a new table or crib or rocking chair often so soon I was out of people to sell to.

"Many of my friends told me I should leave to other towns, find work there. But I refused. I loved my home. I loved watching everyone I knew grow up and live their lives. I saw many things in that village: marriage, children, death, creation. But most of all, I saw true wonder.

"I could spend hours on end daydreaming, making up stories and inventions that would never be, but I wished could. I wanted flying reindeer that pulled a sleigh, and ice that I could turn into anything, and the power to harness the northern lights, and colors of all sorts to decorate the world with! Impossible wonders. I could see them constantly in my mind like a sickness that would never go away. And it was the most beautiful.

"I tried to share my amazement of the world with others around me, but they thought I was going mad. They called me crazy and overly ambitious, telling me leaving the village would probably be the best for all of us. Perhaps even finding a bride. But Malen'kaya was the only home I knew, and I stayed. I stayed because of that and the fact that I didn't want to leave as I did when I was boy. But the longer I stayed, the more alienated I became."

"'Alienated?'" I asked. "What's that mean?"

"To become isolated from difference. The root word is 'alien.' I guess you wouldn't know what those are, would you?"

"Noâ€|"

"That is fine. Many people don't believe they exist anyway. I'll continue."

I motioned for him to go on, helping myself to yet another cookie and some milk.

"Because I lost the people I felt closest to, I began to stay away from the villagers. They only came when they needed something important, like a repair or a new shelf. I continued woodworking and vowed not to take an apprentice because the others would show him this coldness too.

"The only people who still showed me much kindness were all the village children. I told them stories on days their parents were working as so they would not be alone. Only they came to my home daily to hear my made-up fantasies. Only they would ask me questions that there was no answer to. Yes, I wondered like a child and they came to me because of that.

"The children eventually became the ones who saved me. They would come to my door, even when I told them to go away, asking me to make things for them. Usually small things like toy trains or little sculptures or dolls. But they soon became braver. I went to my workshop once only to find that everyone had decorated it for Christmastime. And another incident: they painted wood scraps bright colors to lighten my mood. And they would bake me cookies after stealing their parents' cooking supplies, cheeky rascals. Perhaps this is why I still have soft spot for cookies."

"They are really good," I said."

"I'm glad you like. The children saved me from myself when I thought perhaps it would be better I had nothing. And in return I would give them something to dream about that wasn't a future of work and hardship. By then, I was older man, starting to have white in hair and beard. I had no wife, and no children, so the village young ones became my family.

"But like all children in family, they grew up and left. One by one I watched them leave to have adult lives. It is sad to see someone you cherish fly away, Hiccup. You never know just what to think of them. But they would always have their children come and see me when they were busy, claiming I was best man for it. And they would send the children with cookies to warm by the fire and eat with hot chocolate."

I was curious as to what hot chocolate was, but I let it slide.

"It was after I was starting to get to this age that I thought perhaps I should take an apprentice. That way there would still be someone to carve the necessary items and perhaps become a gift maker. For by then I had started to make small gifts for children that I would give them after church on Christmas. To remind them of how to see wonder in world. So I decided to find young boy who would be

capable of all these things.

"That was when I met Sasha. His full name was Alexander, but everyone called him Sasha. He was a small and very shy boy, with very few friends and almost no family. However he was very skeptical of logic. He had his quirks: funny, yet selfish at times, but had true compassion in his heart.

"In fact, I see much of him in Jack."

"Jack reminds you of Sasha?"

"Yes. They looked very different, but they had the same smile. Filled with mischief and charisma. Good people once you get to know them. Very irritating people if you are on their bad side."

"Like Bunny?"

North laughed. "Much like Jack and Bunny's relationship, yes!"

Still chuckling, North flipped the book open to the next page. It was of a collection of wooden huts in a white plain of snow. The scene was obviously nighttime because the sky had a large full moon and the windows of the houses were lit up in gold, casting warm shadows of blue over the perfect ground. Pine trees framed the entire expanse of the background save for the far left side where a frozen lake could be seen. And right in the back between the forest and the lake was a small cottage. This place was much smaller than Berk, and I had a suspicion where it could be.

"Is this-"

"Malen'kaya? Yes. This was the village I called home. And that house my home and workshop. It was here that I trained Sasha. What a cheeky kid he was! All smiles and shyness. Big lop of blond hair he never could keep out of his eyes. And what kind eyes he had. Very intelligent."

"Can you tell me more about him?"

"But of course! Sasha was very lonely in childhood, like me. He didn't like to work or do things that didn't appeal to his imagination. He would often complain after I told stories of how the world wasn't the way he envisioned it to be. He would tell stories of his own as well. Sasha was a very skilled liar.

"Although these traits may sound very negative, Sasha would work hard when he had to. Always prepared to do whatever it was I required, all to learn something new. He got frustrated when something he made didn't work, but Sasha would get over it. Always learned from his mistakes, improved old projects so they worked.

"He also taught me a lot."

"Really?"

"Yes. He would always ask me to sit and watch the snow fall with him. When I asked him why, he'd tell me of how his life was like at home. Before and after work. He had four younger siblings, all sisters. They would keep him occupied until he could no longer move or speak.

And his father did so many odd jobs to keep them alive that he would always come home too tired to care for family. They became cold and distant because of that. However, there was one thing they would always do together, one that required no effort.

"They would all sit and watch the snow fall each year. Sasha said that this was a guarantee for them, that no matter how hard things got nature would always give something simple yet beautiful. Something that you would have to find in it for yourself. So when he would come to my place and work, and if the snow started to fall, we would stop and sit by the windows to watch.

"Yes, Sasha truly wondered like. I loved him like the son I never had. I taught him everything I could, but even I didn't prepare for what happened next."

"What happened?" I asked.

North paused. "It was cold winter night, about five years after I took Sasha in. We were in bed and asleep. Little did I know the embers in the fireplace were not yet ready to be left to die. There were blueprints and scaled sketches I left nearby that caught fire when a draft got through the crack in the windows.

"It happened so fast. The house was ablaze and no one could get water because the well and lake were frozen over. In my hasty fear I fell down stairs and hurt my ankle. Though I still managed to get out okay, but Sasha was still inside trying to find something. It was a present he had been making for his sister for Christmas. I was outside with others for a few minutes, but he didn't come out."

"So you went back in," I said, "didn't you?"

"He was on the floor. Too much smoke in his lungs. He had the gift wrapped in cloth against his chest. It took all my effort to get him downstairs without getting caught on fire. But the ceiling collapsed.

"He woke up right then, when I fell over from pain of foot. The last words he said to me were, 'I want her to wonder too.'"

We sat in silence. Setting down the empty glass of milk, I finally asked, "Did he make it?"

"Yes." I breathed out as North finished the story. "I shielded his body. The villagers were able to get him out alive. I, on the other hand, was beyond saving. I did not suffer.

"That night, the Man in the Moon chose me to be Guardian. It was Christmas Eve. He asked me what it was that I wanted to do for children. I told him my answer was easy.

"I said to him, 'I wish to do what I have always done. To wonder and make wonderful things that make children smile and imagine things that may not be possible. I am simple woodcarver and toy-maker. I am nothing special. Yet I want to be able to create the impossible'

"So he gave me abilities to. And from then on I have lived as Santa Claus, living in his home filled with works of the mind far away from all other people. But I was still far north like my village. I would

watch the snow fall and relax. But most of all, I could make wonderful things that made children happy all for special reasons.

"That was how I became Guardian. I didn't need to find the answer for years like Bunny, nor am I still looking like Jack, nor was I told what to do like Sandy, nor lose everything for it like Tooth. I was very lucky."

North paused to eat a cookie. Once he finished, he drank what appeared to be a glass of milk that was on the bedside table before continuing. "Hiccup, I must ask what it is you make in your workshop."

"You mean on Berk in the smithy?"

He nodded.

"I take it Jack said I'm apprenticed there?"

"He did."

I shrugged. "A bit of lot of things. Lately I've been working on a new prototype of Toothless's saddle so it's not as heavy, and some weapons that I could use without actually wielding them. Since, you know, I'm really skinny and weak. Not that I'm too interested in them anymore. Why?"

"I was wondering what you see when you go out to your village?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"How to put it? When I look around me, I see things that most people would not. Yes, I see them and their creations, but I also see what could be. The world is a place that you can build and change based on what you see is possible! This is the part of me that has been around for my whole life."

And as he sat there, explaining the wonders he could see, I could see them too. And I knew he knew I could.

"I see a lot of Sasha in you."

"You do?" I asked, shocked.

North nodded. "Yes. He was much like you, more so than Jack."

"But you barely know me!"

"And yet I am sure. I can feel itâ€¦in my belly!"

I stared at him clasp his wide gut, unsure how to take it. After a hearty laugh, the elder man let his hands fall back to his sides and looked down at me with a homey smile.

"Do you have any questions, Hiccup?"

I had numerous, uncountable numbers, but I heard myself say, "Only one."

"Oh?"

"Each person who becomes a Guardian has something they protected and died for, relating to children in a way. That's why the Man in the Moon chose you guys, right?" I cleared my throat and elaborated. "I remember Jack told me Bunnymund gave his people hope after their annihilation, and Toothiana documented everything she remembered and treasured all happy memories. And then the Sandman made his sister's dream come true. And you never stopped believing in the impossible. Always wondering about the world around you and seeing things that could be. Kinda like me, I guess."

"I am not surprised." There was a smile behind those words.

"I guess what I'm trying to say is, what about Jack?"

North watched me questioningly. "What about him?"

"Jack says he doesn't remember his past at all. Does that include the reason why he was chosen? He told me all Guardians are resurrected from the dead. So he did die before and that was why he was chosen. But why?"

"I wish I knew as well, but I am just as ignorant of this. Man in Moon chose his for a reason. When time comes we will all know why."

"Okay." I sighed with a shrug. "I dunno, I guess I'm just concerned for him."

North rested a heavy hand on my shoulder. "So do I. And if I knew the truth, I would not hesitate for moment to tell him and put his mind and heart at ease. Which is why I must ask you to keep this part of conversation secret. Jack is like son to me. I do not want troubling things weighing him down. He hasn't had it easy. Perhaps he will open up to all of us completely someday soon."

"I hope so," I said.

North stood up and smiled down at me with his hands on his hips. "Now, how about we figure out how to translate this book so you can read!"

My eyes widened a bit. "Seriously?"

"Only if you would like to be able to read the Common alphabet."

I could only manage a nod as I pulled out my notebook and opened it to the nearest empty page. North laughed and we sat back down on the bed. He flipped open to the first page.

"All the letters should be here somewhere. Now, shall we start with the vowels?"

Aurora Borealis (Jack's POV)

"Where are they?" I moaned. "It's been hours!"

Toothless gave a pitiful croon too. No doubt he was getting tired of

sitting on a deck with only Roxy to talk to. He wasn't too amused when I threw a snowball in his face (though I swore Roxy was laughing at the Night Fury) so we were obviously off to a bad start..

Tooth fluttered over and squeezed me around the shoulder. "Don't worry. They're still in North's cabin. No doubt talking about anything and everything they can think of."

"Hiccup does seem like the bookworm type, doesn't he?" I snorted. "Okay, no surprise there. They've probably been yammering each other's ears off about everything."

"Can't blame them, bucco. They're both interesting characters who get easily interested about anything. Unlike some of us," Bunny added.

I huffed. "Look, just because I was bored - and still am a bit - doesn't mean I'm not easily interested by things."

Bunny was about to argue back when the door to the captain's cabin finally opened and North lead Hiccup out. The small Viking had North's giant book of stuff cradled to his chest, barely managing to hold it. I was about to offer help, but Toothless beat me to the act, flapping over and crooning. Hiccup smiled and set the book at his feet before giving Toothless a hug around the neck.

"Missed you too, bud. Sorry to keep you waiting for so long."

Toothless slapped Hiccup on the back of the head with his tail, but we could all tell it was playful. Hiccup started to laugh.

"Geez, I apologize and leave you for a few minutes and all I get in return is abuse?"

The dragon rolled his eyes and snorted. The boy laughed aloud at whatever it was that was said.

"Fine! You got me!"

"So how'd it go?" I asked.

Hiccup's beam put the afternoon sun to shame. "I didn't think there'd be so much more outside of our seas! I mean, I've seen so much from a different perspective just from befriending Toothless, but even that's not much compared to out there!" He swung his arm wildly towards the sea heading south. "And North taught me how to read you letters now."

"Did he?" I glanced over at the big man. "How'd that go."

North laughed. "Surprisingly well. He is a fast learner. I would not be surprised to see him writing in complete sentences by nightfall. I gave him book to borrow." North's smile could only be described as fatherly. I couldn't help but grin too. I knew they'd get off well.

"There are so many more letters in your alphabet," he said. "We only have sixteen. Kinda limits things."

"Well, twenty-six could complicate that a little," I noted.

"Too true."

Hiccup, meanwhile was trying to hook the book on his saddle. I laughed and pulled it off. "Want me to carry that home for you?"

"Jack," Tooth warned.

Hiccup shrugged. "I can make it, but I'll just have to fly a lot slower. Anyway, I'm going to wait until nightfall before returning so no one asks where I find a random large book covered in strange symbols."

"That's not for a while."

"I'll drop the book off at the cove and go flying with Toothless. He deserves to spread his wings."

"Won't the villagers notice you're gone?"

"No, there's an emergency meeting about how to save up for winter. No dragon training tonight." Hiccup made a fake-enthused fist punch before letting his arm drop to his side. "And I've been trying to stay away now that I've gained so much popularity from being so good at 'killing' dragons."

"Okay, you've got a point there."

"Besides," he continued, "wouldn't you be seen? If you entered the village. Most everyone still believes in Jokul Frosti. I just feel like that would complicate things a lot."

"Oh. I didn't think about that," I finally admitted. "That would be a problem, wouldn't it?"

We laughed a bit until Hiccup's stomach gave a loud, obvious growl. He blushed so hard his freckles vanished.

"Lunch?" suggested Bunny.

"Gladly." That Hiccupesque grin was back on his face in an instant. "What new food is today?"

"Asian cuisine," I replied. "Rice and other stuff that tastes really good. And egg drop soup. Stay so you can meet and talk to everyone. They'll come up to North's cabin with the food soon anyway!"

Hiccup looked over at Toothless, who snuffed and pushed him away slightly with his snout as if you say, 'Go on and eat.'

"If you insist, bud," was all the Viking said.

"Why not have the dragons dine with us?" asked Tooth. "We could have the yetis bring up some fish."

"Won't it be crowded in there?"

"You worry too much, Hic. Ya know that, right?" I said.

He didn't reply. Bunny and North were already heading into the cabin. Bunny turned to look over his shoulder.

"Well, c'mon. What's taking you?"

"Let's go then!" I shouted while taking Hiccup's wrist. Toothless followed right behind us with Roxy, the two of them in some deep conversation I couldn't hear.

* * *

><p>Dragon time measurements: 1 sun = a day, 1 moon = a month. Because dragons don't have calendars, I figured they would tell time through celestial measurements, such as the rotation of the sun and the moon.

Did anyone see what I did with North's village name? Anyone know Russian? *wink wink, nudge nudge* No? That's fine. Malen'kaya means small in Russian (when describing feminine objects, and the word for "village" is feminine).

As for runes. I'm no expert, but I went back and watched the 'Book of Dragons' scene again and have decided that the Vikings in the movie most likely used the Younger Futhark runic alphabet just as the actual Vikings did way back when, which only consists of 16 letters. I know other runic languages (such as Elder Futhark and Anglo-Frisian) had more letters, but I'll stick to historic basics.

Anyway, school's been going. I'm in the middle of college hunting; top choices are set, and now I'm looking for a good two safety schools (just in case). Going on some visits in a few weeks like other seniors and whatnot. Anyhoo, I'll try to update within the next couple of months. And I'll definitely focus on writing during breaks-namely the winter one.

-Sushi

16. Things of the Past

Hallo hallo! :D

Like I warned, this chapter took some time. I was out of state for, like, ever because of college visits. But I'm back now!

Because I'd gotten positive feedback on going further into the other Viking's pasts, there will be some fillers integrated into the story. This is one today. Enjoy a bit about teenage Stoick, Gobber, Spitelout, Valhallarama, and more. As well as a bit of Stoick's parenting skills in real time.

Also, I apologize in advance for the ending.

Also, I'm sorry this is such a short chapter for such a long wait. I promise the next one'll be a bit more exciting! Now to reading!

* * *

><p>16 - Things of the Past

* * *

><p>Berk: 21 years earlier

"Stoick! Stoick, you up?"

The banging at the front door of the house was persistent. Harald Horrendous Haddock II, chief of Berk growled as he was awoken by the harsh banging.

"For the love of gods, Gobber!" he muttered, throwing open the door. "It's barely sunup! What're you doin' here?"

The young blond stopped his hollering and stood before the chief of Berk meekly. "My apologies, sir. It's just that Stoick promised he'd meet me in the forges today.

"And you two are doin' this so early becauseâ€|?"

"Well, _technically_ I'm not cleared to do this operation, but there's somethin' I wanted to try that requires a lot of firepower. And I can't possibly do that with ol' Smitty lookin' over his shoulder at me every other breath, so-

"-in other words, yer breakin' the rules."

Gobber stopped, realizing what it was he had said, then began with, "Well, _technically_-"

The chief laughed and waved away the excuse. "Go on there. Just if anyone asks, I wasn't involved. Come inside. The lad isn't up yet."

The two went back into the house. It was the same shape and structure as it had been for six generations, though the roofing had just been replaced thanks to the recent dragon attack. Gobber could feel the early morning draft coming from the window; that was yet to have new shutters. He immediately ran up the flight of stairs as loudly as his boots would allowed.

"Up and at 'em, ol' friend! We've got a big day ahead of us!"

He heard a groan from the corner, but other than that there was no reply.

"C'mon Stoick, the day isn't going to wait until your ready to face it."

"It will be when I'm chief," he grumbled, turning his back from his friend so he was facing the wall.

That didn't put a damper on Gobber's spirit. "Says you. If your not aware, your bother's been up for an hour training already! An' he's two year younger than you! Are you really going to let him pass up on you?"

"I don't care, Gobber. Jus' lemme sleep!"

"Ah, your voice is comin' back. Means you can wake up then!"

All the chief heard from downstairs as he read a book was a loud thump - presumably his older son being rolled out of the bed - followed by a loud stream of swears. _Well, the lad's up, then, _he thought to himself before going over to the fire and scooping up a bowl of porridge. Within moments the sound of feet could be heard on the stairs.

"Mornin'" he greeted.

"G'mornin' Dad," Stoick yawned whilst rubbing his bleary eyes.

Stoick was not the most impressive of young Vikings so early in the morning (at least early in his standards). His shirt was hanging off his broad shoulders unevenly, eyes puffy so he looked as though he was squinting, and pants not yet completely laced. The tangle of wild red hair was somewhat hidden by his helmet-a gift from father to son last Snoggletog. Despite all of these "flaws," it was obvious that the sixteen-year-old was a force to be reckoned with. Even his calm statue has a sense of empowerment to it.

"Any eggs?" the boy asked.

His father shrugged. "If yer in need of that, wake yer mother up."

Stoick shuddered. "Porridge is fine."

Everyone in the household, Gobber, and probably a good third of the village knew of Borghild's temper upon being woken prematurely, and those who didn't had at least heard rumors about it.

"Would you like anythin' Gobber?"

"Naw, I'm fine, thanks."

The chief nodded and settled down in the seat closest to the fire. Stoick grabbed himself a wooden bowl and spoon before ladling out a large helping and topping it with some preserves; gods knew fresh foods weren't going to be in abundance anymore.

Gobber sat down at the table across from Stoick (who was sitting next to his father). "So, as I was sayin', I was thinking that if I were able to combine steel wit-"

"Gobber, not now. I'm tryin' to eat."

"Well then, have it yer way. It's not like I've been talking about the last time someone forgot to clean out the outhouse or someth-"

"Gobber!"

He held up his hands in defeat. "Fine fine, I get it. Another one of those father-son team-up's against poor Gobber."

Stoick scowled, Harald laughed. They were soon quite again, eating.

At that moment the door opened loudly and Spitelout walked in with an even louder laugh. His black hair was plastered to his face with sweat and his face was red from exertion.

"Mornin' everyone!" he said cheerily before grabbing some leftover chicken from his back pocket and scarfing it down. Gobber just rolled his eyes at the sight and imitate the action, causing Stoick to choke on his own breakfast of bread and porridge. His brother noticed this and turned.

"Somethin' funny, bro?"

"Not at all," lied the other, finishing his meal in silence.

Spitelout was relentless. "So you're finally awake then, I take it?"

"I've been up for quite a while, Spite," Stoick tried to growl, but was cut off by a long yawn.

His brother laughed. "Not long enough, it seems."

"Lay off, Spitelout. Don't you have some girls to be wooin'?" Gobber demanded.

He smiled. "More than you, I expect!"

"I doubt it."

"Really? Well, I can assure you I'll be having my choice with the girls sooner than you."

"I'd like to see you try, what with you just bein' eliminated from dragon training!"

"Oh, it's on, blondie!"

"BOYS!" roared the chief. They both stopped, staring.

Harald cleared his throat before whispering, "Let's not wake my wife up quite yet. I'm not sure I could take the heat right now, if you know what I mean."

"S'too bad fer you then, seein' Ah've already been woken by all yer shoutin' and racket!"

Stoick smirked into his bowl and finished it as quickly as possible the moment his mother entered the room. "Shall we go?" he asked Gobber.

"Is your ready!"

They both got up, Stoick throwing his dirty dishes into the basin near the back door. "Bye Dad, Spite, Mom."

"Goodbye, son."

"See ya, bro. Hey Gobber!" The blond turned. Spitelout was grinning from ear-to-ear. "Think you'll be getting a girl anytime soon?"

Seriously, though?"

"Faster than you can say 'Night Fury,'" he quipped back before the two left.

"Well, guess I should go too--"

"Not so fast, Spitelout," his mother said. "Ye've been bangin' open doors at all strange times of the day! It's barely sunup! Ah've had it with you an' yer constant racket!"

"But Mo~om! It wasn't just me! Gobber did too."

"Don't just stick tha blame on poor Gobber jus' because he's not part of the family. I have full jurisdiction over you, young man, an' you'll be hearin' a lot of it before yer out!" When Spitelout tried to ignore her, Borghild turned to her husband with an exasperated sigh. "Harald! Do something' about this son of yer's!"

Harald, though, was too busy smiling at the scene to scold his younger boy seriously. It was sometimes funny just to see their family acting like a family, despite the fact that they were not very close most of the time due to his constant need as chief of Berk. Still, he could see their resemblances. Stoick was just as socially awkward as he had been way back when. As for Borghild, well, she was where Stoick and Spitelout both got their excessive amounts of stamina in battle, though Harald himself boasted their strength came from the longstanding line of chiefs.

Harald was proud of Stoick, though he rarely showed it. Heir chieftain and as strong as ten men, easily stronger than his brother if he tried. Though he rarely did, of course; all the Thawfests past could prove that.

He had his mother's red hair and grandfather's stern eyes, already broad in the shoulders, and doing well in the dragon training standings. Stoick was truly living up to his name: calm, intelligent, with a certain brute force that would make any Viking proud. He had already been dubbed a Viking title.

Stoick the Vast.

Harald smiled at the thought. Soon enough Spitelout would be receiving a title as well. Then there would be a guarantee of strength and prosperity in the family. The chief had no doubts that the line would live long and gain much. Both his sons proved that.

"Harald? Harald! Are ye even lis'nin' to me?"

"What was that?" he asked, blinking.

His wife huffed. "Typical. No one in this family ever listens. Too stubborn, the lot of you."

"Dad! Tell Mom to let go of my ear! I can't feel it anymore!"

"Stubborn as an old mule, the lot of us," he muttered under his breath before finally standing up to mediate.

Berk: The Forge

"How are things at home?" Gobber asked as he began heating up the metal.

"I don't know what you mean," Stoick replied as he finished off a slice of bread.

Gobber sighed. "You know full well what I mean. I heard you and your dad are on rough footing right now. Is this affecting dinner table chit-chat at all? Is he making Spite his new favorite son?"

"No."

"Is that the only answer I'm getting?"

When Stoick didn't reply and began picking at his nails with a nearby dagger, Gobber sighed. "Figured."

Still, nothing. Gobber sighed and left the sword in the fire.

"Are you not going to talk to me?"

Stoick yawned. "I would if I wasn't so tired. Remind me again why we're up this early?"

"I've already said it three times, if you'd been listening. Honestly Stoick, your distracted. Tell me what's on your mind."

"It's nothin'."

"And you think I'm going to believe that."

The redhead looked up at his friend with tired eyes. Gobber was standing with his legs apart and arms crossed. There was no getting out of this one.

"I had my portrait done with my dad yesterday. It was the first time I had to stand with him, _see_ him, for more than a few scathing seconds a day, okay? I'm just not sure how to take it."

Gobber's face became sympathetic. "I understand. I never see my dad either, ever since he dumped me here in the forge. Too busy riling up the dragons, ya know?"

When his joke fell flat, the blond tried to change tactics. "Well, I'm sure it wasn't _that_ bad."

Stoick laughed humorlessly. "Oh no, it _was_ that bad."

"Bah, your overreacting as usual!"

"How would you know? You weren't even there!"

"Intuition, perhaps," he muttered while going back to the hunk of heated metal.

"Lucky guess."

"How was your father? Well, I take it. Must've had a lot to talk about, hmm?"

"All he did was ask about training and say 'good job' when I explained what I achieved. It wasn't even heartfelt."

"Oh, I doubt it!"

"You don't even know my father!"

"And neither do you!"

"Look, can we please drop the subject, Gobber?" Stoick groaned.

"Fine," the other replied before his face transformed into a wicked grin. "So, how's it goin' with the ladies?"

Stoick groaned again. "Must you always go to unnecessary topics? Why don't you save this for my future son or somethin'?"

"Well, that is a possibility."

"Enough, Gobber. I kid."

"Aye, sure you do. Anyway, I see the way you look at that girl. What's her name again? Val?"

"Valhallarama, yes."

"She's from another tribe, innit she?"

"Yes Gobber, she is. And her family's moved here so she's one of us now."

"So you're into foreign girls, I take it." The shriveling glare he received stopped Gobber from pursuing the matter. "Pretty lass, though. Much more than Thora."

They both chuckled. It wasn't that Thora was a bad person (far from it, in fact), but she wasn't exactly the most reputable in the looks factor. She wasn't ugly, (many could make a case that she was, indeed, exceedingly beautiful in a fierce sort of way) but she always had a scowl on her face that was far from pretty. And she knew how to wield an axe like no other. Her weapon had been passed down through the female line since the beginning of Berk and they both knew she planned to keep it that way for her future daughter if she were to have one.

"Well, Thora can make a mean lamb stew."

"I don't know if you mean that in a friendly way or not?"

They both laughed a bit more before Gobber turned back to the coals. "Look, what'd I tell ya? Nice strong iron an' steel blade. Finest you've ever laid eyes on!"

"It just looks red hot to meâ€|"

"That may be so, mate, but that's only because you've never had the chance to be trained in the forges like I have. An' I kin tellya that'll be a fine weapon when I'm through with 'er!"

Stoick was still skeptical, but he allowed Gobber to explain every little thing about forgery and metalwork to his heart's content. The two had always been close friends, born within months of each other, and practically inseparable since they were but wee lads, unable to do more than carry small conversations about birds and mud. And the bond had only gotten stronger. Even though Stoick was always busy shadowing his father and Gobber spending the majority of his time in the forge with old Smitty, they still managed to find time to see one another.

Though Stoick could do with less early morning meet ups.

"Stoick? Mate, you in there?"

"What? I-I-I mean, yes. Sorry. You were sayin'?"

Gobber rolled his eyes. "Typical. You weren't. As I was saying-" He was interrupted by the hiss of metal meeting water. "-you should wield this blade today at trainin'. Only way for me to see if it'll actually work."

"Wait, hold up. You want me to use an new, _untested_ type of sword?"

"It at all possible, yes."

"But it may not be safe!"

"Which is why I'm asking you to handle it. You've got skill, Stoick; even Spitelout agrees with your judgement most of the time."

Gobber had a point, but Stoick was adamant. "I don't want to hurt anyone by accident."

"So be careful. You always are."

"Butâ€¦|but I prefer a hammer."

"Because those can cut off dragon heads with efficiency."

"Gobber!"

Gobber, checking the balance of the sword, held it out hilt-first to his friend. "Try this."

Stoick accepted it without hesitation and twirled it a few times. "A bit on the lighter side for me."

"That's the point. Is it leanin' at all?"

Stoick checked. "I think the right is a bit higher."

"Though so. I know you've got the better eye with this one." Gobber snatched the sword and put it under the coals again, grunting as he pulled down on the bellows with a steady left hand. "As I was sayin',

you need to get used to a blade. Swords come in handy, and a good chief always has at least one cutting weapon."

"I could just use a dagger. Like this one." He held it up, for it was still in his hands the whole time.

"Save that for any hiccups in this world."

"Or an axe."

"Sure, why don't you ask Val for her's. Or even better, Thora!"

Stoick huffed. "I don't want to use the sword."

Gobber pulled the blade out and began to beat it, carefully avoiding Stoick's glare as he maneuvered through the small space to the table. "I swear, this pigheaded stubbornness runs in the family. You ever notice yer mum and brother are the same way?"

Stoick threw the dagger, narrowly missing Gobber's head as it embedded itself in a shield hanging from the ceiling. The young smitty breathed out through the nose. "And you've got a temper to."

"For the last time, I don't want the godsforsaken swo-"

"An' don't tell me you don't want to impress young Val there, now would'jya?"

Gobber gave Stoick a shit-eating grin, and the redhead knew he was trapped. The other lad always had a knack of getting him to a position like that.

"Fine," he growled, "but only this once, got it?"

"Aye, aye. Get that stick outta yer ass and you'll be fine."

"Gobber!"

The blond chuckled and went back to pounding on the hot metal. This sword was going to be a beauty, and no one could deny that.

Berk: Dragon Training

As much as he didn't want to, Stoick had to admit that the sword was a fine one. He had excused himself from the boiling hot room in favor of the cooler seaside. Granted, part of the reason why he'd left (aside from Gobber going on about the sword he didn't want) was to see Val; she'd always be around talking to some of the fishermen before training.

And now here he was, in the ring, staring at the weapon in his hands. It seemed to gleam as though it contained its own light, weightless and semi-ethereal. The sword was double-edged, with a strong, well-crafted hilt; the pommel could only be described as exquisite metalwork.

Stoick avoided Gobber's winks after he'd received it. No point

letting the teen's big head grow even bigger.

"'S nice," he finally said.

"Nice? Nice? Oh ho no! You know it's way better than nice, Stoick. That thing is a beauty, tha's what she is!"

"Okay, fine. It's a beautiful sword. Happy?"

His proud grin said all.

"Come on," Stoick barked after slapping his friend's shoulder. "Let's warm up while we still have the chance!"

Stoick gave the blade a few experimental swings, hearing the echo of steel against air in its shining beauty. It gleamed in the little sunlight that managed to get through the thick storm clouds, but it wasn't enough to be considered blinding. Just nice. Stoick huffed and swung it at an old shield, watching in amazement as the metal met the wood and sliced through it as though it were softer than curdled milk.

By the gods, it was a fine sword.

"Toldja so," murmured Gobber as he walked by.

"Hush you."

"Ah look, here comes Val."

And indeed it was her, Valhallarama. Her brown hair was pulled back in a thick braid, green eyes as wild and expressive as the crooked smile on her face. She was a strong lass of fifteen, and though at times could be considered awkward and gangly, she was definitely a force to be reckoned with.

Next to her was Thora. She was even taller than Val and about twice as wide, broad in the shoulders and hips with strong hands and a steady gaze. Her stormy blue eyes were set on Stoick, or more specifically his new blade. And she wasted no time in confronting him about it.

"What's that you've got there, Stoick? If it isn't a sword!" She looked up at him with nothing more than a sharp glance before focusing back on the weapon. "Mighty fine thing, that one. Hang onâ€¦I thought you were the hammer type!"

"I am," he said evenly. "This was a gift from a friend. Seemed like a waste not to test it out."

"It's name?"

"I've not yet found one for it."

"All the best blades have a name," she quipped.

He frowned. "I know."

"So you haven't named it yet." It was a statement. "Well done."

"If we're done, I'd like to finish warming up, please and thank you."

Thora smiled cheekily. "Gettin' riled up now, Stoick? That seems unlike you. You're always so, well, stoic."

"Don't you have somethin' better to be doing, Thora?" Gobber asked sharply.

The blond rounded on him. "I wasn't talking to _you_!"

"Leave him out of this," Stoick commanded, noting that the argument was getting on his nerves.

She laughed. "Or what? You seem too chicken to protect your little _boyfriend_ anyway."

"We're not dating!" they said in unison.

"Just friends."

"Nothing else."

"Though that would be weirdâ€|"

"Really weirdâ€|"

"Would you mind that sort of relationship?"

"Gobber!" Stoick *not really* winced. "Don't even joke about that!"

Val laughed a bit, a light breathy sort of sound that sent shivers down Stoick's spine. He liked the way her mouth would form into a crooked grin when she smiled like that.

Thora smirked; it was a very symmetrical curve compared to her friend's. "Done? Because I was thinkin' we've got a wee bit o' time before the lesson starts anyway. Might as well warm up with you. Or should I say 'against you,' _chief_?"

Stoick didn't like the sarcasm at all. He sighed wearily before turning to meet Thora head-on, sword held comfortably in both hands. "This could get ugly."

Thora grinned even wider, showing all of her strong, white teeth. "Good. I like ugly."

At that point Thora's boyfriend (and betrothed) Erik entered the arena. "Hey guys! Sorry I'm late! What'd I miss?"

"I'll be dueling Stoick, and proving to the people of Berk who really should be leadin' the armies when the time comes!"

"Good luck with that," Gobber said under his breath as he patted Stoick on the shoulder. "Knock her deadâ€|well, figuratively. I don't think it'd look good if you actually killed Thora."

"I get it Gobber. Just have everyone clear out of the arena. Or at least to the side."

"Got it."

"Ready chiefling?" Thora asked, twirling her weapon with ease.

"Not against yer axe," he said firmly.

"Oh~ Afraid yer goin' ta break it now, chief?"

"No, but I'm not sure of this weapon's potential. And I think you'd like to have your daughter see this fine weapon at some point in the future."

The others in the ring could practically hear her tick. Thora spat at Stoick's feet and handed her axe to her boyfriend Erik, drawing her blade. Everyone moved in unison as the two teens began circling one another. This went on for several long moments before Thora finally let out a ferocious battle cry and lunged forward. Stoick parried, their swords clashing with a loud clang before they fell back into their original circling.

Thora took the second offensive. And the third. And the fourth. Stoick calmly dodged her wild swings, focusing more on blocking than attacking. Everyone could tell he wasn't truly trying, from the gathering villagers to the rest of the initiates. Including Thora.

She let out a frustrated roar as Stoick dodged yet another swing. "What's the matter, Stoick? Too afraid you'll leave a scratch on me?"

"No!"

"Then prove it!"

"Fine!"

Stoick let out an even fiercer shout than Thora had mustered and made a strong downward cut at her head with both hands. His opponent raised her sword to block the attack.

And Thora's blade shattered.

There were gasps from all around as the Vikingess fell flat on her back, hilt still in her hand, a look of shock across her face. Stoick was on top of her in an instant, his weapon at her throat.

"Do you surrender?"

She didn't reply.

"Do you?"

"A Viking never backs out of a fight!" she roared, sitting up and pushing the boy off of her. It was then she who was pinning Stoick to the ground and holding the shard of metal to his throat. "Now I must ask you, do you surrender?"

Now Stoick was the one without words to say. He lay on the ground, dumbfounded.

Erik was the first to speak. "Lay off, Thora. He's had enough!"

"Yeah," Gobber interjected. "Not to mention he won fair and square!"

"Shut up!" she shouted back, holding the jagged edge even closer to Stoick's exposed neck, hovering over his jugular artery. He could feel the cold metal digging in a bit too close for comfort when:

"Well, looks like you all got a bit o' drama in afore the class started!" boomed a voice from behind the teens. "Best we get started afore the lot o' you are at each others' throats!"

They all turned around to see their teacher, Gork the Bellower, standing at the arena entrance, his beefy arms crossed.

"Ye've had yer fun. Now get out, all o' ya, so we can start the read trainin'!" When no one responded, he bellowed, "Move!"

There was not a moment's hesitation as they all fled. Stoick got up and offered Thora a hand, which was smacked away with a dignified huff. She stormed out almost immediately, Erik close behind holding her axe. The soon-to-be-chief gathered the metal shards still left on the ground. He tossed them into the weapon's cart (knowing they would be disposed of later) and took his leave.

But before Stoick was able to leave, he saw Valhallarama standing alone by the entrance. She saw him and eased over lightly, whispering something in his ear.

"Svikin meÃ° galdur, obrjÃ³tandi."

"What does that mean?" he asked.

She turned and answered. "'Forged with magic, unbreakable' of the ancient tongue."

"Svikin meth gladur, obrjotandiâ€|" murmured Stoick. "Obrjotnadiâ€|it seems an apt name. Thank yo-"

But the girl had vanished into the crowd gathering outside of the arena.

The arena area, for once, was packed to the point of overflowing. It wasn't all that surprising either. With there being nearly a hundred initiates this year, they had to be divided into ten groups of ten, and from there they were narrowed down to five per group. And each group lost members one by one until only five people were left standing. This year, it had been Stoick, Gobber, Thora, Spitelout, and Val. Spite had been eliminated just the other day so now it was down to those four.

This was probably the best entertainment they would have for the entire year.

"First up, Stoick!"

That wasn't a surprise either. The chief had just arrived, so this was probably the only time he had in the day to see the action.

The fight was against a Gronkle and went fairly quickly. Stoick favored his hammer as always, deciding that Obrjotnadi shouldn't be drawn until it was actually needed. Two strikes later the dragon was down and he was walking away with a solid victory. He had just enough time to see his father nod before waving to the gathered people and leaving.

"Up next, Gobber!" Then he added, "Make me proud."

"Best of luck," he said to his friend.

Gobber grinned. "You betcha!"

He was given a flock of Terrors, and picked them off with ease. It seemed like no time had passed until he was sitting next to Stoick in the stands again, albeit a bit sweatier and out of breath.

"Next, Valhallarama!"

Anticipation rose as Val entered the arena from the shadows. She walked with her head held high and her back straight, shoulders back.

Their instructor nodded to her. "Choose any weapons you wish."

The girl stopped for a few seconds before deciding upon a dagger, a coil of rope, and two shields. She put the dagger in her inner vest sheath and wrapped the rope around her waist in a loose loop before slinging one shield on her arm and the other on her back.

She nodded. "I'm ready."

The doors opened to reveal an unfed and very feisty Hideous Zippleback. There was some nervous whispering among the crowd; it was the first time one person had been asked to face one alone. Even Spitelout had been given a break by facing only two Terrors.

Stoick leaned forward slightly as he watched. Though he didn't notice his unconscious motion, Gobber did out of the corner of his eye and couldn't help but smile. Val's fighting style was radically different from the others. Stoick was one of the few who was observant enough to notice her skill. Some would probably consider it dirty tricks; he thought it was graceful. Like now.

The right Zippleback head took a bite forward, which Val dodged with ease, rolling to one side with her shield up to protect her face from the other attacking head. This took her to the far left of the stadium, practically against the wall. The dragon wasted no time shooting gas and sparking it. But Valhallarama's swift form was already gone. The girl dashed with amazing speed around behind the dragon: a standing duck.

She jumped over the hasty tail whip, her legs angled into a fluid curve. She landed after what felt like a lifetime to Stoick, pivoting to face the Zippleback. With nothing but a shield in her hands, the young Vikingess rolled to the right while taking off of her arm.

The dragon turned to face her head-on. By then she was ready. Once she was upright again, Val transferred the shield to her hand and tossed it at the left head of the approaching Zippleback as though it were a disc or some sort. Once the splintering impact made its mark and the head was dazed, the shield on Valhallarama's back was in her hands.

The people gathered took a collective gasp, Stoick's being one of the loudest. Valhallarama had taken two bounding steps before leaping into the air towards the stunned Zippleback head. Her body made a clean right angle towards it, hands on either side of the shield making a loop, face a concentrated scowl.

Her arms were on either side of the head, shield used as a makeshift zip line. Val slid down the neck of the Zippleback and used her legs to bounce off the chest, the momentum swinging her around so she landed on its back. Shield discarded, she pulled the rope from her waist. One loop later it was lassoed around the necks, tying the two heads together. A second loop made it around the tail. Val jumped off and surveyed her work.

The more the Zippleback struggled, the tighter the rope became until it was no longer able to move comfortably. The lack of coordination would make it impossible to fly away, to flee. A perfect target.

Then Val's hand went to the dagger. It came out with a glint which made the dragon not twenty paces stop its struggling and freeze. She walked up to the Zippleback, holding the shard of metal in both hands. And then her feet were literally a step away. She stood and stared at the bound dragon, hands gripping the dagger in a white-knuckled way, raising the thing slowly up to her chest, then above her head, standing and staring and waiting as the crowd began to get anxious.

"C'mon Val!" one voice shouted.

"Go on, away with the beast!" came another.

"What're you waiting for?"

"Do it!"

The light in Val's eyes flashed, and Stoick found himself suddenly afraid, though he didn't know why.

The dagger came downâ€¦

â€¦and severed the rope clean in two. Amidst the boo's and shouts for a kill, Valhallarama turned around and let the dagger fall out of her hands and to the ground. The Zippleback seemed weary of its surroundings as it fled back to its cage.

Stoick let out a long breath he didn't realize he had been holding.

"Well done Val," their instructor (Gobber's dad) called. Despite his encouraging smile, everyone knew she had been eliminated for that.

"Why doesn't she just use a weapon to kill it?" someone muttered.

"Or at least maim it!" bellowed another.

"Maybe she's a wee bit weak in the heart?" Stoick turned around to see the first speaker's wife shrug. "A shame, really. That girl's got a lot of potential. Looks like it'll all be wasted talent. What we get, allowing an outsider in."

_Not too weak, _he thought as Erik took his place in the arena. _She just refuses to. But why?_

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"Why don't you kill them?"

Valhallarama looked up from where she was staring. "Stoick, hi. I didn't see you there. You gave me quite a shock!"

He smiled at her laugh, but his face turned serious again. "Why don't you kill them? The dragons, I mean. You have the skills. I think you're probably the best in this entire class. So why don't you?"

She didn't say anything.

"Val. I've been watching you fight since the start. Almost every time you face a dragon, you have a good angle to go for the kill. But you don't. They always do, but never you. Why is that?"

Val's smile shrank slightly, but it was obviously just as heartfelt. If anything, it seemed sad. "Stoick, do you know why my family moved to this island?"

_What does that have to do with my question? _he wondered, but he did nothing but shake his head.

"My mother was killed in a fight. Another casualty of this war against dragons. I'm from further east-the conflict there is much more prominent than here on Berk. That's why we came."

"Wouldn't you want revenge then?" Stoick asked. She looked shocked and he blushed a bit. "I mean, those beasts killed yer mother. Your family. Isn't that reason enough?"

"After she was killed," Val continued, "I couldn't forgive them. I did try to kill them, all of them. And I did. But the blood I spilt that dayâ€|and the fear I saw in their eyesâ€|I couldn't do it. I can't do it. Not anymore."

She turned to look at Stoick. "I may be a warrior, but I'm not a murderer. Even if they kill all of us, I refuse to kill all of them. Because I don't think they're all bad. It's like they don't know anything but how to be bad. And I think that maybe, maybe someday, we can have peace. Maybe someday we'll be able to see them not as enemies, but as another peoples we need to treat as equals. Can you understand that?"

In that moment, the two of them standing on the edge of the tallest

point of the wooden walk down to the pierre, neither of them knowing what the future would hold. Neither of them knew that they would be dating within a fortnight, Stoick stuttering with the last of summer flowers before Val would ask him instead (Gobber there and laughing all the while). Or that they would share many a strange and philosophical talk that would only end in confusion. Or that they would be side-by-side during Harald's funeral, Stoick crying in her arms after the ceremony. Or that they would be married in four short years. Or that after three miscarriages Valhallarama would finally-_finally_-give Stoick one and only one child: their little Hiccup.

Neither of them knew the memories, the lives, that they would build together. But it would change on that one faithful day.

Stoick smiled at Val in the most comforting way he could. She looked back, stunned.

"I don't know if I can, or if I ever will." He took her hand. "But I'm willing to try."

Berk: Chief's House (21 years later)

Stoick woke up, a few tears in his eyes. He sat up slightly before flopping back down with a sigh. It had been years since his last dream about Valhallarama. In fact, he barely remembered that day. So to see it again in so much detail he didn't even know was in his memory was both shocking and heartbreaking.

The chief lay back down, his breathing evening out again. Already the crystal-clear thoughts were becoming muggy as they did after all dreams in his life. It was almost comforting. He began to fall back into the eves of sleep.

Until the sound came.

Stoick had never heard a sound like that in his life.

The bloodcurdling shrieks that echoed through the house could only be described as though one was possessed by some sort of otherworldly being. He jumped out of bed immediately by the high, piercing sound, sword in his hand and warrior's adrenaline pumping through his veins. He crouched, waiting.

Silence.

His sleepy daze gone, Stoick listened carefully. The sound had vanished momentarily. Yet still he was wary. So sound like that would just vanish and he wouldn't let it until the source was found. So Stoick crouched next to the fire and crept slowly across the room.

Then:

AAAAAAHHHH!

It came from upstairs.

"Hiccup."

The chief wasted not a moment, taking the stairs two at a time with his sword still in his hand. The room was dark, and it took Stoick several moments before his eyes finally adjusted to the single burning candle on Hiccup's table. He swooped over and scooped up the tiny waxy flame and made his way over to Hiccup.

The boy was tangled in his blanket, moaning and writhing. Stoick stared, unsure what to do. Had Hiccup always been this skinny? This vulnerable? Since when had Hiccup been so small?

Then his mouth opened and there came the ear-splitting sound again. Stoick nearly dropped the candle in shock. So the source had been his own son! What in the world was causing it? A nightmare? Stoick wasn't sure what to do. He see down his sword and the candle on floor by the bed. Then he sat down beside Hiccup.

Hiccup whimpered, tossing his head back and forth. His face was pale and cold sweat was prickling over his body, soaking through his hair and clothing. Then his mouth opened once again, a breathless, shuddering sob. And then he was screaming again. Stoick watched, unable to move as the animalistic shrieks then turned into comprehensible words.

"Mooooooooom! Mom, Mommy! No, no no, no no no no no, Moooooooooom!"

"Hiccup?"

"MOOOOOOOOOM! AAAAUUUUGGH!"

"Hiccup!" he shouted, shaking the boy's shoulders with both hands. "Son! Wake up! Wake up!"

The boy's eyes did open; Stoick was relieved, but not for very long. He almost immediately realized that the green orbs held no emotions, staring blankly forward and completely unseeing. Stoick took many long, shaky breaths, but there was no change. Then Hiccup gasped: Stoick hadn't realized his son had stopped breathing altogether.

Tears began to course down the boy's pale, freckled cheeks. He stared at a spot just past his dad's right shoulder.

"Please," he whispered. "Don't make me hurt her. I beg of you. What have you done to her? Bring her back. Please she's the only mother I'll ever have I don't want to do this I didn't hurt her! I didn't hurt her please"

He fell into heaving sobs, eyes still wide open, unblinking, in pain and filled with fear. It broke Stoick's heart to pieces. Hiccup had the same eyes as his late mother: bright green and full of quizzical intellect that could only be described as genius. Hiccup had her spark in him.

But in that moment he was only a shell of himself.

Stoick knew he and his son weren't very close. Even still they rarely made eye contact, let alone exchange words over the dinner table. If they even ate dinner together, that was. They'd always been off doing their own things. Val had been the bolt that held them in place, but

she was gone now. He didn't have the magic touch she seemed to possess.

So he did his best. He sat there and cradled the small boy to his chest, murmuring words of comfort.

"Yer okay, Hiccup. It's just a dream. It's nothin' but a dream, so please. Wake up now. Wake up son."

"â€|Dad?"

Stoick let out a sigh of relief before letting go of his son. Hiccup was staring at him, obviously confused. "Dad? I don't understandâ€|Momâ€|"

"It was just a dream. Sleep. Put yer mind at rest."

Hiccup continued his dazed gaze until he finally leaned back onto the mattress and shut his eyes. Stoick didn't leave until he heard the boy's breath even out. The hands he didn't realized were clenched loosened, sighing heavily, before heading back down the stairs to his own bed.

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The next morning, Hiccup didn't say a word of what had happened the night before. Stoick watched him carefully, but there was no response so he didn't pry. It wasn't the Viking way. Instead, they ate their respective breakfasts in their usual uncomfortable silence, ending abruptly when Hiccup said he had some things to take care of and Stoick himself informing his son that he had his duties as well.

They left without another word.

* * *

><p>Sorry for not really continuing on with the plot. This idea popped into my head last month and I thought, "Eh, why not?"

Now I know there's a lot of stuff going on about who Hiccup's mom may be in the next HTTYD film, but I've decided this story will stand separate from the rest of the plot, so Val is who I make her (even if it ends up being someone else). And yes, Thora is Astrid's mom in my story.

I did use Icelandic, translated from my old *cough cough, hated, cough* friend, Google Translate. Hope that isn't too stupid sounding.

If anyone has ever watched the French dub of HTTYD, they call Hiccup 'Harold,' so I thought I'd play off that name with Hiccup's grandfather being named Harald (which is an actual Viking name). His overall coldness to Stoick is what I thought could be a root cause for Stoick's coldness to Hiccup. Yes, this is my head cannon.

_Now I have another question: would you like more detail into the Guardians as well? I told you brief stories, but they could use more love in my opinion. As well as Jack because I've told you absolutely

nothing about him. Let me know in the comments._

And as always, thanks for reading, hope you enjoyed, comments are always welcome (please and thank yous, constructive criticism if any), and I'll see you next time. Sorry this author's note dragged on for so long.

Sushi

17. Author's Note

To all my amazing followers, hello.

I got a guest review a few days back which prompted me to write this quick note to everyone.

I'm very sorry. It's been a while since I've updated this, and I personally feel like I owe it to everyone to explain why there hasn't been a new chapter in a long time.

I will be honest. I've been going through a bit of a writer's block. And by a bit, I mean to the point where I stare at my laptop for a few hours and nothing really happens. No inspirational magic. Last week I finished an entire chapter, but after reading it over I felt that the quality of the writing was poor and that it also diverged from the story in a way I personally felt was bad. As well as conflict with future plans.

****I AM NOT GIVING UP ON THIS STORY!****

I just want to make that very clear. This is a temporary break until I find inspiration. I'm probably going to start this story back up after swim season ends and I can destress a bit. That's also why I've been writing a Homestuck fic at the moment; to destress while still writing and improving.

But I just want to thank all of you from the bottom of my heart. A year has gone by since I first started this, and I'm currently sitting at 98 favorites and 119 followers. That's insane! You guys are insane! And I know there are many guest reviewers out there too! Thank you all so very very much!

Hopefully I'll be back in full force by March!

-Sushi

End
file.